Doctorow's First Novel *Kevin Starr*

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts—September 6, 1975, 50 cents

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Feeding the Russians
The Arab Boycott
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The Obsolete Home
Jack London Reconsidered
Kissinger's Hand
The Film King Lear
Primary Politics

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TRB

from Washington ®
September 6, 1975

Kissinger's Hand

Watch Secretary Kissinger's right hand. He is talking to a breakfast group. He is not going to be quoted under his own name; what he says will be attributed to a "high administration source." He wears a summer business suit, light blue shirt, dark blue necktie. His voice is composed and conversational with a slight German accent, long since accepted by reporters and the world.

The restless hand accompanies everything he says in a faint gesticulatory echo. His left hand takes no part in the conversation. The movement is as suave and fluid as the hand of a ballerina. For a placatory explanation, it opens. For an appeal, it faintly supplicates. For emphasis it forms a fist, just for a second, and touches the tablecloth. Are Middle East problems tangled and intricate? The hand twirls vaguely. Kissinger seems quite unconscious of the hand's accompaniment. The gestures modulate his meaning as the voice does his feelings.

A fascinating subject, Kissinger, by any standard. He won the Nobel prize; his face appeared simultaneously on *Time* and *Newsweek;* his Gallup rating was 56 percent when the President's was 52 percent; he has a dual role, top hat for Secretary of State, trench helmet for chairman of the National Security Council. He wears them both. We have had strong Secretaries before—John Foster Dulles and Dean Acheson—but has any had the importance for his President that Henry has for Jerry?

Now he has concluded, perhaps triumphantly, his latest to-and-fro, tennis set of diplomacy in the Middle East. He is a sensitive, even a romantic figure. Instantly he catches the nuances of a question, answers it immediately and skillfully (right hand replying, too). At the Salzburg press conference he threatened, in a choked voice, to resign over the wiretap incident. Four newsmen and 13 government officials had their home phones tapped (including a senior military adviser to Defense Secretary Laird, and a senior adviser to then Undersecretary of State Elliot Richardson with whom their principals frequently talked.) It was in the bad days of Nixon, with leaks and threats of leaks. Kissinger said he knew nothing of the tapes but congressional suspicion mounted. Then came his dramatic threat to quit at Salzburg. Was it a diplomatic tantrum, or was it a calculated act, directed at an audience of one—President Nixon? The latter shortly afterward took responsibility for the wiretaps (for national security, of course).

Kissinger doesn't want to stay on much longer at the State Department, or at least that is what "a high official source" says. Only the strongest pressure from the President will keep him in office after November 1976 if Republicans win, the source says. Very likely true; but does the left hand know what the right hand is saying? Mr. Ford told a press conference, "As far as I'm concerned he can stay as long as he wants to."

A great diplomatic victory, in the Middle East, say, would give Kissinger a wider freedom of choice, whether to stay on and awe his critics, or to step down in a cloud of glory. But the Sinai agreement must win approval of Congress. How do Congress and the nation feel about 100 to 200 American civilians operating technical warning systems as a part of an Israeli-Egyptian interim settlement? This is an emotion-packed issue that might dominate Congress for months.

But the world has still bigger long-term issues. How can future generations understand, Kissinger asks, how we stumbled into an arms race that leads nowhere when the question of the nuclear future of mankind is at stake? He asks the right questions whether he gives the right answers. Another issue will probably dominate American foreign policy, one way or another, for the next half century. How can a nation with only six percent of the world's population hope to continue to consume a third of the earth's energy, a huge proportion of animal protein in a protein-starved world, and 40 percent of the world's raw resources? It simply can't be done. Signs of rebellion by less fortunate lands appear with increasing frequency. A basic question in American foreign policy for the next 50 years is whether we attempt to preserve this volcanic San Andreas economic "fault" between rich and poor countries by force or whether we gracefully assist them to rise to our level. Rather grudgingly it is the latter policy that we have been trying to follow.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund hold annual meetings here this week (September 1) and Secretary Kissinger addresses a special UN Assembly meeting in New York. These organizations report that the gap between rich and poor nations is growing. And reporters at the 1974 Bucharest conference on population, the Rome Food Conference, the Mexico City conference on women and now the Lima conference of unaligned countries know the sullen envy felt toward the richest nation, with six percent of the population. Some anti-American feeling washes off upon our friend, Israel.

Canada's late Lester Pearson warned that the planet can't survive "half-slave, half-free, half-engulfed in misery, half careening along toward the supposed joys of almost unlimited consumption." Pearson wondered if the UN, born in San Francisco 30 years ago, would reach its 50th anniversary? Indeed the strains on the UN have never been heavier. A vague but ominous demand arises for "a new economic order" which, translated, appears to mean share-the-wealth. In its report three years ago the World Bank observed, colorlessly, "As a generality, it is probably true that the world's burden of poverty is increasing rather than declining." Income distribution, it said, is "severely skewed." Last week the World Bank made its latest report in the same gray, neutral tone: the rise in fuel and food prices is putting its severest burden on the one billion people living in poor countries, a fourth of planet Earth's passengers.

We ask Kissinger to guide us through problems like these. Meanwhile populations grow; resources shrink; the world spends an amazing $200 billion annually on armaments. (India, for example, where Malthus has triumphed, spends more than four times more money on defense than education.) It is a situation for which even Kissinger's right hand might have difficulty finding a gesture.

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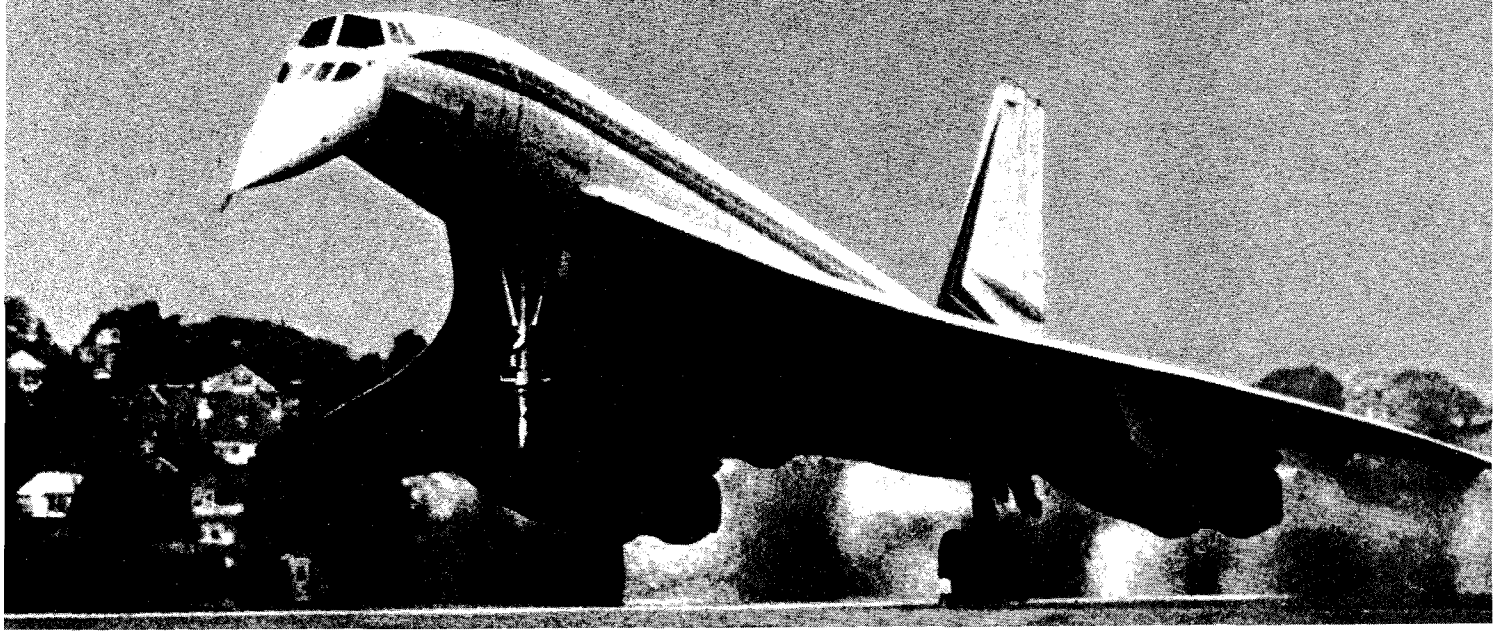
Is Europe only 7 hours ahead of us?



In Britain, television watchers ll soon be tuning in to an electronic wspaper which will allow them to read e news on their TV screens.

In France, the government now is a Secretary of State for the Condition Women.

In Germany, there's a plan to ace workers at the center of economic cision making by requiring that labor is presented on the boards of dustrial corporations.

In Denmark, the ullet is so well sub- dized that it is said e "artists and staff sitively bask in tax oney."

In Sweden, there e no slums, no one is overty stricken or with- it assistance in times of ill- ess or accident, and every- ne can look forward to secure old age.

Quite obviously, all ese countries know something we don't. he United States cannot be secure in ne claim that we are foremost social and technological progress. nd the more we learn about what's eing done in other countries, the more e can apply that knowledge to our own.

But where do you get news of ese developments?

Rarely through our own press, hich barely has time and space to cover omestic affairs.

You could subscribe to a lot of reign newspapers, but then you'd need ranslators and more time to spend on eading than you could possibly manage.

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Atlas has one serious goal: to keep you informed on what is happening outside America, by bringing you the best of the world's press.

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On Henry Kissinger: "There are [in Kissinger] kernels of Metternich, plus others of Casanova and, in unguarded moments, of the Marquis de Sade." (*Excelsior*, Mexico)

On Gerald Ford: "Mr. Ford looks as if he might be the most conservative American president since Hoover in 1929-33, and just might have the same economic consequences." (*The Economist*, England)

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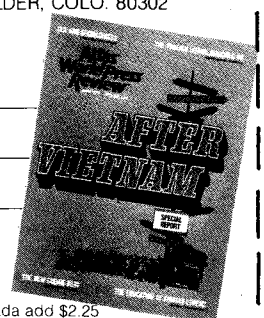

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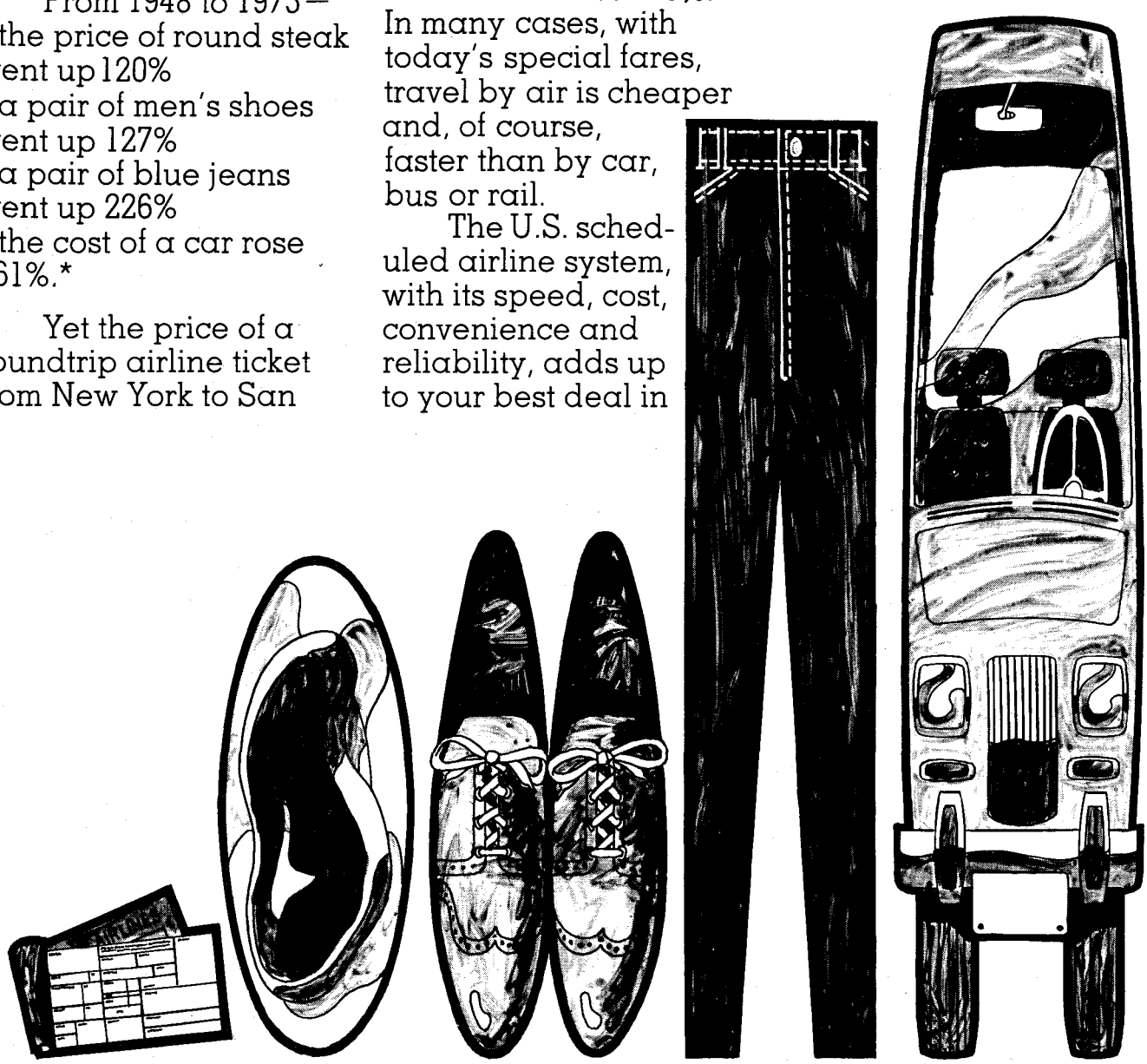
Jets and Jeans

Despite inflation and soaring fuel costs, an airline ticket remains a 1975 bargain.

From 1948 to 1975—
- the price of round steak went up 120%
- a pair of men's shoes went up 127%
- a pair of blue jeans went up 226%
- the cost of a car rose 261%.*

Yet the price of a roundtrip airline ticket from New York to San Francisco during those 27 years rose just **18%**—and you get there twice as fast. During that time the average airline fare went up **22%**, while the overall Consumer Price Index rose **123%**. In many cases, with today's special fares, travel by air is cheaper and, of course, faster than by car, bus or rail.

The U.S. scheduled airline system, with its speed, cost, convenience and reliability, adds up to your best deal in travel. That's why the airlines today are the dominant form of public passenger transportation between our cities, and between this country and the rest of the world.



Source: Consumer Price Index & manufacturers. Air fares as of August 15, 1975

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The Obsolete Home

Housing rivals the auto industry as the sickest sector of a sick economy. In July new housing starts were at an annual rate of 1.2 million units—the lowest rate for the month since 1966—but even that was seen as good news because it was a 14 percent increase over June. The closer you look for an answer to housing's problems the more apparent it becomes that more is involved than just the current recession. To be sure, high interest rates and low consumer confidence caused part of the slump, but the real trouble lies elsewhere.

Like the automobile industry, the housing business is in the midst of fundamental change, a change camouflaged by the miserable condition of the economy. What seems to be happening is this: the traditional single-family home is becoming increasingly uneconomic for both individual families and society; yet the practical obstacles to building the alternative, apartments—either for rent or for sale as condominiums—multiply daily. If the economic recovery gains momentum, rising consumer confidence (which makes families willing to undertake the longterm commitment of buying a home) should help create a housing revival, but with both segments of the industry—the single-family home and apartments—suffering from peculiar infirmities, the best prospects are for nothing more than a mild revival.

A housing squeeze—a genuine shortage, perhaps—impends, as rising demand, caused by "baby boom" children searching for homes, meets truncated supply. The realistic outlook is not for a healthy homebuilding industry, but for an ongoing struggle between sensible economics—which would seem to indicate more apartment construction—and good politics, which wants to keep alive the dream of a single-family home for everyone, a dream that has a stranglehold on the American psyche.

It is easy for public officials to *appear* to do something about housing problems, but, faced with these pressures, the steps they take may ultimately cause more harm than good. Excessive federal spending—in an attempt to push up incomes—may drive up interest rates, and high mortgage rates are the nemesis of a vigorous housing industry. Attempts to bring the single-family home within the reach of many middle-class families—through various subsidies—will stimulate the construction of homes that are more burdensome to the nation (in

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energy, transportation, public facility, and land costs), and, at the same time, aid families whose needs are less acute than those of the poor. Protecting renters with rent control may discourage new apartment construction and in the process restrict the growth of the real estate tax base of cities. Unfortunately the self-defeating nature of these measures does not mean they will not be tried.

Crucial to the understanding of housing's problems are the changing economics of the single-family home. Families now are being "priced-out" of the single-family home market.

The arithmetic is fairly simple. Between 1963 and 1970 the median price of a new home rose about 30 percent (from $18,000 to $23,000) meanwhile family income jumped 72 percent (from $5737 to $9867). Between 1970 and 1974, the pattern reversed: home prices rose more than 50 percent (to $35,900) but median income rose only a little over 20 percent ($12,836). As everyone knows, a lot of other things happened between the end of the '60s and the mid-'70s. Mortgage rates have jumped substantially—from about 6.5 percent in 1965 to about 9 percent now. A two percent difference on a mortgage for a $40,000 home (25 percent down, with a 25-year maturity) means $40 more on a family's monthly payment, or $480 a year. At the same time, energy costs—a major operating expense for any homeowner—have skyrocketed, though actual expenses obviously vary by region and type of fuel. (The new all-electric homes are considerably more expensive to operate than those using a combination of electricity and natural gas. Fuel oil is the bane of New England home owners.)

There are no signs of quick dramatic relief on any of these fronts. The rise in the purchase price of a home reflected inflation of all major costs—land, material and labor. Between 1970 and 1974, according to the National Association of Homebuilders, land costs increased nearly two-thirds, not only because good sites became more scarce, but also because local building restrictions—such as sewer moratoria, growth limitations and zoning regulations—further reduced available plots. During the same period, labor costs rose an estimated 39 percent, and building materials costs jumped 35 percent. Together these costs account for about three-quarters of the total price of a new home, with financing (the construction loan the builder needs before he sells to a permanent owner), and the builder's overhead and profit representing the rest. Neither labor nor material costs have slumped sharply as a result of the homebuilding depression. In the first half of 1975, for instance, material costs rose at an annual rate of nearly nine percent.

As for mortgage rates, these, too, will remain high as long as general interest rates stay high. It is not financial hocus-pocus to say that mortgage rates must reflect the overall level of interest rates. To attract consumer deposits, savings associations—the single largest source of mortgage loans—must themselves pay interest rates competitive with alternative investments for savers. The backlog of old mortgages, some bearing five or six percent interest rates, makes this very difficult. Even though new mortgages get nine percent, they constitute only a tiny percentage of savings associations' entire portfolio. On the average, savings associations now receive only 7.5 percent on their portfolio of mortgages, and, if there's a sharp runup in interest rates, savings associations will—as they have in the past—lose billions and billions of potential deposits. Savers will simply put their money where they can receive higher returns.

Though it isn't necessary, that millions of families remain permanently excluded from the single-family home market, if incomes begin rising significantly faster than home prices, a reversal could begin. But the prospects don't look good. A sharp housing recovery would probably increase land inflation abates significantly, construction cost increases probably won't moderate.

While all this has been happening, there also has emerged a new awareness of the high economic costs of the traditional single-family home. A study done for the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Council on Environmental Quality ("The Cost of Sprawl," April 1974) calculated, for example, that a high-density, planned development achieved significant energy savings over a traditional single-family development: the high density development required the use of about half as much gasoline, half as much natural gas, and two-thirds as much electricity. There is simply less housing area for each family to heat and cool, fewer walls to dissipate heat, and fewer trips that require families to use their cars. (For purposes of the study, the high-density development was hardly a skyscraper monstrosity. It was assumed to include 20 percent traditional single-family homes, 20 percent townhouses, 30 percent two-story walk-up apartments and 40 percent six-story apartments.)

For local governments, similar economies existed. Road construction costs were estimated to be about 60 percent of the level required for a single-family development, and comparable savings could be achieved on maintenance and operating expenses. You simply don't need as many roads. The same logic applies to sewage, water and storm drainage facilities, as well as utilities' pipes and lines. The exact numbers aren't so important, because the savings simply confirm common sense. The story isn't completely one-sided: multi-family housing obviously has drawbacks. For example, though total air pollution is believed to be less in the high density development (there is less driving), the concentration levels are greater—a reflection of the higher density. And some families may think that apartment living inevitably involves a sacrifice of privacy.

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Given all the impinging forces, you might guess that more high density housing is going up, but you'd be wrong. Multi-family construction has suffered more severely in the current slump than single-family homes. In the first six months of 1975, apartment-type construction declined about 70 percent, while single-family starts dropped only about 16 percent. And, although single-family construction has started to edge back upward, apartment construction remains virtually moribund.

Why? Part of the severe drop reflects the after-effects of a massive, speculative boom in apartments and condominiums in 1973 and early 1974. Financed heavily by Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), the boom was fueled by greed and inexperience. It produced a glut of buildings in a number of areas, particularly Florida and California, where apartments were intended for leisure use or for retired couples. These buildings, planned during the expanding 1972 economy, often had disastrous cost overruns, helped create shortages of building materials, and intensified construction inflation. The boom and bust cycle influences statistical comparisons, making the decline in apartment construction seem slightly steeper than it actually is. But the sharp drop in new apartment projects isn't simply a statistical quirk. The main reason for lagging development is more basic: developers do not think they can make a profit. The arithmetic of high operating costs, high mortgage rates and high construction costs just doesn't work out. According to the calculation of one experienced real estate appraiser in northern Virginia, a developer renting a two-bedroom apartment at $300 would literally have to be paid to take a building site in order to make a customary profit. In addition apartment projects have always been considered riskier investments than single-family developments (one reason: you can slow down, or even stop, building single-family homes if sales lag, but the entire apartment project must sink or swim). Consequently mortgage rates are higher, now about 10 percent.

Conceivably the game might change—if mortgage rates decline slightly and if vacancy rates drop sufficiently to convince developers that high rents will stick—but there's another factor working against new rental projects: developer psychology. The increasing hostility of landlord-tenant relations, and the proliferation of rent control laws have left their mark on developers. The movement towards rent control is understandable. Tenants (many of them poor) are being hit with rent increases, reflecting higher energy and labor costs: unfortunately if apartment construction remains for long at current low levels, there will be additional pressures for higher rents. The goals of constructing new units and satisfying existing tenants—by keeping their rents low—are directly at odds. The recent rise in construction costs mean that older buildings can rent far more cheaply than newer ones. Low rents scare developers by offering cheap competition. But if old rents rise toward the level of new units, they create enormous pressures for rent control—which scare developers even more. Existing tenants and prospective tenants (affluent or not) are enemies, and the old tenants are more numerous and better organized. In addition there appears to be plenty of room for rents to rise, because, nationally, they have lagged behind the overall rate of inflation. In June the rent index of the Consumer Price Index stood at 136.9 against 160.6 for the overall index, and 181.4 for the "homeowner" index.

Condominiums—apartments owned by individuals, who can use the tax advantage of home ownership—once seemed the answer to a prayer, but things haven't worked out very neatly. As one mortgage banker puts it, "The condo market was created by developers trying to bail out (of rental projects), rather than serving the public." The result has been a considerable consumer backlash. There was high-handed salesmanship and disclosure problems; buyers didn't quite know what they were getting themselves into. Moreover, condominiums involve self-government; owners must police and manage their own building—an unfamiliar process of collectivism fraught with a myriad of problems, from petty building politics to serious legal uncertainties. Finally home purchase is now regarded not only as shelter, but also as a way to get rich and a hedge against inflation. Condominiums are sufficiently new to make resale values uncertain and potential buyers are therefore wary.

The irony is that these increasing impediments to expanding housing supply come just as demand for new housing appears to be growing rapidly. The children of the "baby boom" are now flooding the housing market. This floodtide will not really begin to ebb until the mid-'80s. In the 1960s it was the teen-age and the young 20s segments of the population that grew the fastest. Now, in the late '70s and early '80s, it will be the population between 25 and 44.

Superficially, the combination of demographics and economics contains all the ingredients of a housing shortage: high demand meeting restricted supply. Such a shortage implies rising rents and increasing prices for new and existing homes, with the most affluent coping the best. Most "shortages" in our society are highly subjective, and just how bad this one might become depends on questions that are now unanswerable. Will families decide to spend more of their income on housing? Will individuals decide to live together more frequently, stretching the existing supply of housing, or will many existing single-family homes be subdivided? Will the high cost of new construction make rehabilitation more attractive, slowing the rate of deterioration of older homes and apartments?

What is clear is that the "baby boom" children represent a political constituency of enormous poten-

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tial power. Reacting primarily to homebuilders—and the recession—Congress, and less willingly, the White House, have already embarked on a course of subsidizing single-family homes for middle-class families. Mortgage rates on some VA and FHA loans have been fixed at seven and three-quarters percent (to a smaller extent, the same subsidy also has been given to some conventional mortgages). In the 1975 tax cut, Congress granted a $2000 tax credit for newly-purchased homes. Left to itself, Congress would have done much more. In legislation vetoed by the President Congress offered subsidized loans down to six percent.

Some measures may be harbingers, when—and if—complaints of disappointed "baby boom" homebuyers begin to reach Capitol Hill. The level of complaints is hard to predict. Traditionally families in their late 20s and early 30s have flocked to single-family homes. (Only about 20 percent of those in the 20 to 24 age bracket own a home, but, in the 30 to 34 age group, the proportion rises to nearly the national average of about 60 percent. But the post-war children aren't behaving like their parents. They're marrying later, divorcing more often, having fewer children and sending both men and women to work—factors that may weaken the lure of the single-family home.

Subsidizing frustrated homebuyers may make good political sense, but it makes much less sense on economic and social grounds. Homeowners already enjoy a tax advantage—the deductibility of mortgage interest payments and real estate taxes—not shared by renters, and this subsidy goes overwhelmingly to middle-class families. (In 1972, according to the Treasury, the government lost $6.2 billion in revenue from these tax provisions, and more than two-thirds of that went to families with incomes exceeding $15,000.) Additional subsidies would simply expand the distortion, and, if the housing market does indeed tighten significantly, the poor—despite rent control laws—may find themselves at an increasing disadvantage. Economically, anything that keeps up land costs and mortgage interest rates cannot ultimately be good for housing.

Against the background of these problems, it is easy to forget one overriding fact: most Americans are relatively well-housed, and, over the last two decades they have become increasingly better-housed. In 1950, for example, the Census Bureau estimated that nearly 30 percent of the population was living in "substandard" units; by 1970 that had declined to about 7.5 percent (a "substandard" unit, among other things, lacks basic plumbing facilities). Likewise, crowding has decreased. In 1950 about 16 percent of the population lived in conditions officially described as "crowded"—meaning more than one person to a room—but, two decades later, the proportion had been cut nearly in half. That is a comforting record, but the question now is whether the trend will continue, and, if not, how rapidly it will reverse itself.

The New Hampshire Effect

Primary Politics

In simpler times, when party bosses controlled delegations, if the educated observer didn't know who was going to be chosen, at least one could tell who was going to do the choosing. Recently, however, a cycle has set in, whereby, after each presidential election, the national parties establish reform committees that write new rules to be applied the next time around. Then, in turn, state legislatures begin to reshape delegate selection plans—sometimes to conform to the newest version of the reforms, sometimes to serve purely parochial interests.

Most of the current tinkering with primary laws has been at the hands of the Democrats. This is partly because the Republicans have controlled the White House recently, and there has not been much doubt about whom they intended to nominate and partly because the Democrats have steadily accumulated control of more state legislatures and governorships in the past few years. In any case as the end of this cycle more nearly coincides with the actual beginning of the next presidential campaign season, it becomes easier to gauge what effects new laws might have—and state legislatures almost never resist the temptation to devise a system that will help a local favorite or help the state party's establishment either to get in line behind the eventual nominee or keep its options open.

One of the loftier devices designed to alter the course of the 1976 presidential contest was hatched by Mark Shields, a Washington-based political consultant high in the hierarchy of Sen. Muskie's 1972 campaign, and Barney Frank, a Massachusetts state representative. Tired of New Hampshire's overblown influence, they are seeking to persuade other states in the region—Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and possibly Maine, Connecticut and Vermont as well—to hold primaries at the same time, thereby overshadowing the New Hampshire result. There are only about 100,000 voters in each party in the New Hampshire primary and they habitually confound media predictions and presidential campaigns. Two or more other states voting on the same day would be an improvement.

Regional primary plans have been kicking around Congress for years, mostly going nowhere. In attempting to persuade the states to do it on their own, promoters of the New England primary have apparently set aside a basic premise of the reform movement of the past few years—that an early, simultaneous grouping of primaries would benefit the frontrunner. Having to run simultaneous campaigns in three or four states right off would be difficult for insurgent campaigns (like McCarthy in 1968) or long-shot contenders (like McGovern in 1972), both of which types seek to concentrate on one state at a time,

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building credibility as the primary season progresses. Shields responds that the frontrunner will have it the hardest of all because he will be expected to run and do well everywhere, whereas the long-shots could focus on a single state at a time.

Presumably the $1000 contribution limit and the availability of federal matching funds have persuaded supporters of the New England primary that early money will be less important this time. But to be matched with federal monies, funds must first be raised from small, private contributors and current records show that some campaigns are finding that a more difficult proposition than others. Wallace, Jackson and Bentsen started early and are way ahead. For the rest—Udall, Carter, Sanford, Harris, Shapp and perhaps Bayh, Church and Shriver—the old rule that political money is pragmatic, that a campaign must prove itself before rank-and-file supporters are willing to dig down, may still apply in 1976. If so, lumping several early primaries together could work a hardship on the long-shots who cannot afford to support statewide organizations in several places simultaneously before demonstrating a concrete voter appeal.

What are the prospects of states going along with the consolidated primary idea? Connecticut, Maine and Vermont would have to abandon their traditional caucus-convention systems, adding three more to what nearly everyone agrees is already too many primaries. In Vermont the appropriate legislation nearly made it through both houses before the legislature adjourned and Vermonters plan to try again early next year. In Maine and Connecticut, however, there is apparently less enthusiasm and new primaries are unlikely. Rhode Island, where only a date change is necessary, has already opted for an early June primary.

The plan gained its best reception in Massachusetts, where anticipating that New Hampshire would not willingly give over its quadrennial hold on stage center, the proposed legislation provides for a primary on March 2, or on a date to be determined by the Secretary of State, *i.e.*, whenever New Hampshire holds one. In New Hampshire, on the other hand, the legislature has already passed a law that says simply that New Hampshire will hold the first presidential primary in the nation, "one week before any other state." One observer believes it might all come down to who can get the ballots printed faster—and with its tiny electorate, New Hampshire probably holds the edge there.

Unlike Monopoly, where Marvin Gardens can be relied upon to stay where it is each time around, in presidential politics the board keeps changing. One of the easiest and most important ways of rearranging the board is changing the date. Momentum is vital in presidential campaigns; when you run is almost as important as where. Also date changes are easy to justify—hold the primary earlier so that voters are given a good look at all the contenders, or, hold the primary later so that the field is winnowed and whoever wins has a real chance to gain the nomination.

In addition to the date changes that will take effect if the New England primary comes off, Nevada, Idaho and possibly Washington will all hold a primary the same day as Oregon, giving May 25 the flavor of a spread-out western regional primary. Also Ohio has moved from its traditional spot in the middle of the pack to the very end, joining California and New Jersey on June 8. These are three of the largest states in the country, accounting for more than a third of the delegates necessary for nomination. Thus if no clear frontrunner is established by the home stretch, there will be a lot of chips on the table next June.

Finally the date change regarded as most consequential is the one that moves New York from the end of the course up to April 6, nearer the front, and on the same day as traditionally liberal Wisconsin. There are two not altogether conflicting predictions about what this change will mean. Some believe it will guarantee a more crowded field of candidates for the New York test, and thus enable uncommitted slates of prominent party officials to win more spots. This, it is said, will advance the presidential ambitions of Gov. Hugh Carey by guaranteeing him more control over the huge New York delegation.

Others argue that an early New York primary is the best piece of luck to come Sen. Jackson's way since last year's Arab oil boycott. The New York Democratic primary is traditionally regarded as about 30 percent Jewish and Jackson's pro-Israel record is expected to attract heavy Jewish support. With the liberals off scrapping with each other and with George Wallace in Wisconsin, Jackson can be expected to concentrate on making a strong showing in New York. If it works out that way, Jackson's 1976 campaign could gain the early momentum it so badly lacked in 1972.

Candidates making a serious run for the nomination usually want to go into the convention at the head of a unified, loyal delegation from their home state. In these circumstances local favorites tend not to want a crowded, competitive primary field, and with the proliferation of Democratic candidates this year, state legislatures have tried to accommodate. Republican Gov. Daniel Evans recently vetoed a new primary bill for the state of Washington. The law would have made it easier for Henry Jackson to control that state's delegation in 1976, and Jackson forces are expected to try to get it passed again early next year.

In North Carolina, there was a move earlier this year to abolish the state's presidential primary—won by George Wallace in 1972. Depicting this as an attempt to thwart him personally, Wallace paid the legislature a much publicized visit, thereby ending the idea. Now, however, former North Carolina Gov. Terry Sanford hopes to establish himself by beating Wallace in North Carolina. His chances will be much improved if he is able to square off one-to-one against the Alabama

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governor, with no other candidate involved to split up the anti-Wallace vote. A cooperative legislature thus added two helpful clauses: to enter the North Carolina primary a candidate must have qualified for federal matching funds in at least 20 states, and, although there are nine other primaries within 10 days, pledge to "campaign actively" in the state.

In Texas, the seventh largest Democratic delegation, Gov. Dolph Briscoe recently signed into law a scheme designed to keep most of the 1976 delegates loyal to native son Lloyd Bentsen. It requires that any presidential candidate who enters Texas must file full slates of delegates in every state senate district by mid-March. No other state requires that you run everywhere or nowhere. The early filing deadline, the requirement that you must run statewide, and the fact that the plurality winner in each district will probably take all the delegates are so obviously designed to keep out competition that even the Texas legislature was embarrassed. They added a clause to the law providing that the Texas primary will be held only once, in 1976, after which it will self-destruct.

Ken Bode

Mr. Bode is the former director of the Center for Political Reform.

White House Watch

Ford From Afar

Between August 10 and 25, when the President vacationed at Vail, Colorado, and visited six other places for speeches, seminars and local interviews, this reporter stayed in Washington and took a holiday, too—from television and radio as well as from other forms of work—and neither saw nor heard Gerald Ford. Texts and transcripts of his speeches and question-answer sessions were obtained at the White House, but they added little or nothing of substance to what he was reported to have said. No White House assistants were asked to amplify and explain what he said. The result was a fortnight's unaccustomed impression of the President from afar, derived from approximately what any other lazy citizen would have known about what Mr. Ford was doing and saying during this period.

The texts did highlight one characteristic that had been previously noticed but never paid much heed. Mr. Ford distrusts the simple and unadorned declarative sentence. His participation in the preparation of his speeches varies from none to a lot, depending upon the importance he attaches to the occasion and the subject. Once the drafts have been prepared, however, he departs from them only to add a cosmetic emphasis that is unconvincing. In one of the more important speeches of this tour, the one to the American Legion at Minneapolis in which he warned both the Soviet government and congressional critics of his arms control policy that failure to achieve and consummate a satisfactory SALT 11 agreement will result in a two to three billion dollar annual increase in US arms expenditures, the statement in the advance text that "I commend the American Legion" became "I strongly commend." "I am glad" became "I am very, very happy." "All Americans are proud" became "all Americans are terribly proud." Typically, "I hope" came out "I honestly and sincerely hope." Mr. Ford's greatest asset as a candidate for nomination and election next year is his reputation for being honest and sincere about everything in contrast with his predecessor's reputation. The reputation is more likely to survive if he omits the cosmetics.

The effects of the appointed President's formal declaration of candidacy in July became ever more apparent in August. Snipey questions at White House briefings about who was paying for his trips, including the trips that supplemented the Vail excursion, crept into print. The official explanation that the taxpayers were paying only for strictly presidential journeys required difficult distinctions between Mr. Ford's role as President, as leader of his party, and as candidate, and between the portions of his travels that were undertaken in each of the roles. His needs and sensitivities as a candidate clearly accounted for some of the defensive references to his continuing quest for accommodation ("détente") with the Soviet Union and to the criticism from the political right and left that in this endeavor, and particularly in his signing of the European security declaration in Helsinki, he was selling out American principles. "Freedom must come first," the President said repeatedly in differing words, trying to placate the critics. He also concealed a deserved rebuke to some of the critics in his statement, that: "It is easy to be a cold warrior in peace time, but it would be irresponsible for a President to engage in confrontation when consultation would advance the cause of peace."

The requirements of the candidate—no imposition, of course, upon a politician who had been in public office for 26 years—became most evident when the President had to deal with the impact of some remarks that Mrs. Ford had made in a magazine interview given months ago and published while he was in Vail, and in a later television interview. As columnist George Will pointed out, Betty Ford deliberately manufactured a chance to say in the magazine interview (before a cancerous breast was removed) that she invited her husband to sleep with her "as often as possible." She remarked in the television interview that she wouldn't be surprised if the Fords' 18-year-old daughter Susan confided that she was having an affair. Mrs. Ford also implied that in times past the Fords had assumed that one or another of their four children had dabbled with

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marijuana. A few Republican politicians complained, and Mr. Ford's own informants evidently told him, that these remarks had outraged a significant number of prospective voters. The uproar, a mild one from where I sat, impelled the candidate and President to say in Milwaukee: "Let me . . . put this in proper perspective . . . What Betty was really trying to say was because of the closeness of our family and the understanding between children and parents, we are deeply concerned by the moral standards by which the family has been raised . . . So, I am real proud of what Betty tried to say and I regret there might have been some misunderstanding of what she did say." There was no misunderstanding. It's too bad that the President felt that he had to apologize for his wife's candor and indicate in the process that she didn't know how to say what she meant to say.

John R. Coyne, Jr., a former White House speech writer who worked for two Presidents (Nixon and Ford) and two Vice Presidents (Agnew and Ford), observed in *The New York Times* that the experience had taught him that "it is nearly impossible to arrive at conclusions about the reality of the political man beneath the surface of his rhetoric" and that this was specially true of Gerald Ford. It was obviously true of Mr. Ford in the period particularly cited by Coyne, the 1974 congressional campaign, when "he never knew what to say next and neither did the four of us who did the bulk of the writing for him." But some of the President's delivered remarks during the Vail period

make me doubt that it's always true of Gerald Ford. One may be sure that the President meant and believed every word of it when at a symposium in Vail he defined the dubious basis of his energy policy: "Painful as they are, higher prices do promote conservation, and higher prices do promote increased efficiency in the use of petroleum products." He dramatized and completed the current rejection of a premise that until lately underlay one of the major elements of orthodox American wisdom when he said: "Cheap energy encourages waste and preserves inefficient energy technology. When the price of energy reflects its true value to society, as determined by the market place, there will be an incentive to stop squandering it . . ." He was reflecting the true Gerald Ford, though in a brief reply minimizing the extent to which he really has tried to master the complexities of the energy problem, when he said in answer to a question about balancing economic against environmental needs that the way to do it is to get FEA Administrator Frank Zarb and EPA Administrator Russell Train together and let them work it out.

The President's definition of himself in a Milwaukee television interview (quoted here from the transcript) as "a practical conservative with a middle-of-the-road orientation" was standard political hackery, but his performance generally seemed to bear it out. Practical conservatism, for instance, required him to qualify a blanket reference in July to "the mistaken, stupid idea that regulation protects people." In the course of restating and broadening his declared determination to "take the shackles off American businessmen" by eliminating or reducing enormous areas of federal regulation, he grudgingly acknowledged in a Chicago speech that "some—and let me qualify it by saying some—regulations are necessary and appropriate; for instance, involving health, safety and the environment." His audience of hardware manufacturers made it clear by the ups and downs of their applause, as other audiences with their own special interests have when the President is on his deregulation kick, that they oppose all regulation except the regulation that protects them and their markets. Mr. Ford asserted in the Chicago speech, more clearly and emphatically than he has in others on the same theme, that he proposed to compensate for deregulation by stepping up anti-trust law enforcement and dealing by other means "with areas that anti-trust laws do not touch, these other regulated and legal monopolies and the government sanctioned cartels." A mid-level official who has helped the President formulate this policy and the expression of it was asked after Mr. Ford returned from Vail whether he fully understood the extent of the challenge to powerful and protected segments of the American economy that he professed to be proclaiming. The official said he thought the President understood it but wasn't sure he did.

John Osborne

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Submitting to Blackmail

Justice for the Arab Boycott

by Nathan Lewin

Three assistant attorneys general marched up to a meeting of a House Judiciary subcommittee on July 9 to express the Ford administration's opposition to a proposed law introduced by Representative Elizabeth Holtzman of New York, which would make it a federal crime for an American business concern to participate actively or passively in the Arab boycott. It was a distinguished delegation. Chief spokesman was Antonin Scalia, formerly a professor of law and then chief counsel to the Administrative Conference of the United States, who was one of the very last Nixon appointees as assistant attorney general in the office of legal counsel. The second member was Thomas Kauper—one-time Supreme Court law clerk, thereafter a law professor and, for the past several years, an effective and respected assistant attorney general in charge of Justice's antitrust division. The third member was J. Stanley Pottinger, who came into the Nixon administration early and did a creditable job as HEW's director for civil rights before becoming assistant attorney general for the civil rights division. Although an aggressive civil rights program was not a priority goal for the White House during his time in office, Pottinger has managed to produce a respectable record of enforcement. On July 9, the group's performance was distinguished only by the obtuseness of the legal reasoning it put forth and the offensiveness of the historical parallels it invoked.

The best place to begin an appraisal of the Justice Department's appearance is with an understanding of the legislation it opposed. It was directed, as Rep. Holtzman explained on July 9, at "many reports of Arab economic blackmail aimed at American firms which trade with Israel or are owned by or employ Jews. Arab nations and businesses have not only directly refused to deal with such firms, but they have sought to force other American firms to discriminate against them as well."

The Holtzman bill deals only with "secondary boycotts"—a term familiar to labor lawyers. A long time ago labor unions discovered that they often could bring powerful pressure on employers if they picketed a key customer of the employer rather than the employer's own operation. Although owners of a supermarket, for example, have no personal interest in who wins a wage dispute between a dairy and its employees, a picket line at the market that sells the dairy's products may be much more effective in compelling the employer to raise his wages than a similar line at the dairy's bottling plant. The supermarket owners would probably become concerned over their own potential loss of customers and would, accordingly, pressure the dairy to raise its wages. This kind of economic pressure on a neutral designed to force him to assist one side in an economic dispute has been viewed as unfair and illegal under our own labor laws since 1947.

Applied to international commerce the "secondary boycott" strategy produces the following paradigmatic scenario: A boycott of Israeli products or service by the Central Bank of Libya would have little or no impact. So the Central Bank, like the dairymen's union in the wage dispute, determines to squeeze Israeli concerns by making demands of American neutrals who deal with Israel. It informs exporters to Libya, for example, that if they want to use Libyan banking facilities for letters of credit, they will have to certify that they "have no direct or indirect connection with Israel"—which means that they have no "Zionist tendencies," provide no technical assistance for Israeli concerns, and are not affiliated with businesses on the Arab Boycott List (which uses singularly inexact criteria of inclusion and exclusion). The more important and powerful the neutral, the tighter is the squeeze on Israel. And if a respected and wealthy banking concern, such as Bankers Trust Company, can be induced to participate in the arrangements, the likelihood of enlisting powerful neutrals is substantially increased.

The Holtzman bill deals directly and simply with the problem. It makes it a federal crime, punishable by imprisonment up to three years and a fine up to $100,000 (or up to one million dollars for a corporation), for a firm to be the instigator of such a scheme—*i.e.*, in the position of the Libyan bank or its agents. It also makes it a crime—punishable only by a fine (up to $50,000 for individuals and up to $500,000 for corporations) for a neutral business to go along with such a program—*i.e.*, to do what the American exporter or Bankers Trust Company does. And finally it authorizes anyone hurt by such an arrangement—such as a Jewish employee or a firm cut off by a neutral because of its Israeli ties—to sue for triple damages from the instigator or single damages from any other participant.

Not everyone on the House subcommittee understood that the Holtzman bill is aimed only at

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secondary boycotts. In an opening statement, Representative Edward Hutchinson of Michigan, probably the subcommittee's most conservative member, listed his own concerns, among which was the similarity of what the Holtzman bill forbids to the demand by the United States that no cigars of Cuban manufacture enter this country. "What," he asked, "makes a similar request by an Arab country [presumably barring goods manufactured in Israel] reprehensible?" And Representative Robert McClory of Illinois indicated similar confusion during the hearing when he asked how Arab policy differed from American wartime embargoes or boycotts.

The bill does not, of course, prevent any Arab country from keeping Israeli products outside its borders. Such exclusion, if implemented jointly by several Arab countries, is a "primary" or "core" boycott—a means of political persuasion that finds precedent in international relations, even though economists frown at its use. In fact, as Rep. Holtzman recognized, one of the most serious practical problems in this entire area is that the governmental policies of a foreign nation are beyond the reach of our criminal law. This is true both because the perpetrators are outside American jurisdiction and because official government conduct is viewed as an "Act of State" that our courts cannot evaluate for either civil or criminal purposes.

Rep. Hutchinson accurately observed, in his opening statement, that the instigator of the boycott would usually be "either a foreign government or a foreign business," and that "in either case personal jurisdiction would be most difficult." The party who could most easily be reached by American courts would be the neutral business that has been enlisted, through economic leverage, as a participant in the scheme. Unfortunately Rep. Holtzman's bill describes this leverage as "coercion" and defines the instigator as one who "coerces by economic means." The term "coercion" was picked up by the Department of Justice contingent—whose legally sophisticated members surely recognized that it is unlike any other form of "coercion" known to the law—which used it as the basis for one frontal assault on the proposed legislation.

To the extent that the Holtzman bill prohibits a foreign company from causing or "coercing" dismissals of Jews or members of other religions by American firms, it covers acts that are already barred by the employment discrimination provisions of the federal civil rights laws. Assistant Attorney General Scalia first noted, on behalf of the administration, that it had no difficulty "in principle" in agreeing that the same kind of prohibition against religious discrimination could be applied to a firm's decision whether to do business with some other concern. In other words, the administration would agree "in principle" with a law forbidding an agent of an Arab company to "coerce" an American firm not to do business with a Jewish-owned company, as well as with a law prohibiting such discrimination if it originated with the American firm. "When, however," said Mr. Scalia, "the prohibition extends beyond the act of coercion, and applies as well to the act of yielding to, or avoiding such coercion . . . then it produces an entirely unreasonable result. It renders unlawful under coercion an act which would be perfectly legitimate where coercion did not exist. This arrangement stands the normal legal principle on its head."

What Mr. Scalia "stood on its head" was the concept of "coercion," which is known quantity in the antitrust and civil rights areas—whose experts were then sitting beside him. In no case reported to date has acquiescence in the demands of the Arab boycott been secured at gunpoint; terrorists are still unknown in this field of endeavor. "Coercion" in this context amounts to nothing beyond the promise of more profit, or the threat of less. At one time, monopolists and other antitrust violators tried to persuade the courts that they were "forced" to engage in anticompetitive practices by the need to generate profit. That line of defense—with an exceedingly narrow exception, in particular situations, for a company that will imminently go out of business—has now been solidly rejected. Defendants in employment discrimination cases brought under the civil rights laws have also claimed that they rejected black employees because they were forced to do so by the union, or by customer demand, and that they should not now be ordered to rehire such employees or give them proper seniority because it would cause serious financial harm. None of these defenses was accepted by the Justice Department, and the courts have rejected them all. There is a well recognized rule that "economic duress" is simply not a defense to a criminal prosecution: its assertion means only that abiding by the law is costly.

Representative Barbara Jordan glanced at this distinction when she asked Scalia, "Is it wrong, then, for me to succumb to coercion because I am going to lose dollars and cents, is that wrong?" The reply was an end run: "It seems to me it's not wrong for you to allow somebody to coerce you across the street, assuming your walking across the street is not unlawful. It just seems to me it's unfair to say it's lawful for you to walk across the street, but if somebody makes you walk across the street it's against the law, on your part, not on the person who is twisting your arm. That doesn't seem to me to be a very rational system of justice."

Once it is clear that the "coercion" is just a matter of more or less dollars to the business that claims to be "coerced," the props fall from under Scalia's subsidiary argument that you can't "rationally" be guilty of a crime if you are "coerced" into doing something that you are free to do if not "coerced." Jurors and legislators are free to vote their consciences; if they accept money for their votes or yield to economic "duress," they commit crimes. An American company may decide, for reasons of its own, not to do business with a firm that has

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"Zionist tendencies" or that does business with Israel. But when it does so to generate profit or prevent loss of business in response to a specific demand from another concern, it is in the area of commercial bribery.

Holtzman's bill recognizes the only realistic way to overcome the lure of added profits is to make compliance with the demand, if detected and prosecuted, more costly than rejection. It achieves this result by threatening the neutral participant with criminal prosecution that carries no imprisonment but imposes a heavy fine. Holtzman explained that the criminal penalty provision was inserted "to allow the second company to have a strong leg to stand on in its bargaining position with the first company. It can say, 'If I comply, I will be subject to criminal penalties.'" She explained that in view of "the economic pressure that has been put on American companies, . . . it may be very important to give American companies that leg to stand on." And, one might add, if the company doesn't want the balance afforded by that "leg," it must still take account of the costs of a criminal conviction.

The Justice Department's second objection to the Holtzman bill concerned the fact, in Mr. Scalia's words, that "an entirely new type of unlawful discrimination is created, namely, discrimination on the basis of a person's support for or dealing with a foreign country." In addition to prohibiting secondary boycotts aimed at promoting racial or religious discrimination in employment or other business relations, the bill prohibits economic pressure aimed at harming anyone "by reason of direct or indirect support for any foreign government, or dealing with or in, any foreign country . . . when such support or dealing is not in violation of the laws of the United States." This, said Scalia, "establishes the principle that Americans may not apply indirect commercial pressures against foreign countries unless our government has declared support of, or dealing with, such countries to be unlawful." How, he asked, would this affect a church-owned business enterprise that refuses to deal with a wholesaler who sells products of a manufacturer who has substantial interests in South Africa? In another analogy that Scalia now admits offended "some of my Jewish friends (and virtually all of my Jewish enemies) . . . in their moral rather than their logical faculties," he compared the boycott of Israel today with that of Nazi Germany before World War II. "Should Jewish-owned companies and small businesses have been prohibited from exerting economic pressure upon persons or corporations that had substantial business in that regime?"

As one who counts himself among Scalia's Jewish friends (since our days together at law school), I find the analogy offensive to my logical "faculties" as well as to less rational instincts. There is, we must admit in fairness, some danger that an inartfully drafted law or an overbroad judge's reading of a carefully drawn one could interfere with the right Scalia is trying to protect—the freedom of American citizens, acting on strong personal views regarding the policy of a foreign government, to take economic measures to affect that policy. But that sweeping freedom is simply not involved in the Holtzman bill.

An initial distinction is that the "support or dealing" provision of the Holtzman bill relates only to the *third* party in the boycott situation. The Libyan Bank, to return to my earlier illustration, may not "coerce" Bankers Trust Company to cause Bankers Trust to discriminate against a particular exporter because that exporter has business interests in, or does business with, Israel. If a law such as the Holtzman bill had been on the books in pre-World War II times, it could only have prohibited "economic pressure" on neutral companies that dealt with those who, in turn, supported or dealt with Germany. Jewish-owned companies and small businesses would *not* have been prohibited from exerting pressure directly on those who dealt with Germany, even if they could not boycott a department store to force it to discontinue stocking the goods of a company that dealt with Germany.

his leads into a second major logical and practical distinction that Scalia overlooked. The Arab boycott scenario invariably involves powerful business entities pressuring those who are less powerful; that is probably the reason for Rep. Holtzman's unfortunate choice of the term "coercion" as descriptive of what the instigator of the boycott does. When the Central Bank of Libya and Bankers Trust Company confront a relatively small exporter and tell him that he may continue to do business with either or both only if he ceases doing business with Israel or fires his Jewish employees, the exporter faces an extraordinarily difficult practical choice. This was not true of the intermediate parties in any similar secondary boycott of firms affiliated with Nazi Germany. There were no large foreign or domestic interests that could exert economic leverage, and the immediate object of the boycott by "Jewish-owned companies and small businesses" might have found it well worth its while to continue to deal with firms affiliated with Nazi Germany and give up the boycotting suppliers. And the same might well be true of a wholesaler that is boycotted by the church-owned business enterprise because it sells the goods of a firm affiliated with South Africa. It may choose to give up the church's business rather than that of the South African supplier.

The difference, which the Justice Department ignored, is between authentic grass-roots efforts with American citizen initiative and those efforts set in motion by foreign governments utilizing powerful economic interests to secure compliance. If Elizabeth Holtzman's bill does not now adequately draw that line, minor amendments to its language can probably do the job.

A third distinction that the conglomerate of assistant

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attorneys general failed to recognize grows out of the language of the bill. Even its challenged "support or dealing" clause is keyed to "support for any foreign government" in the abstract. Opposition to South Africa's *apartheid* policy, to Nazi Germany's anti-Semitism, or to the Soviet Union's restrictions on emigration are not blanket condemnations of a foreign government. Conversely, those who have boycotted businesses dealing with countries practicing particularly distasteful policies are not seeking an end to support for the foreign government, but only the termination of a particular policy. A court reading this language will probably distinguish between the Arab boycott—which views Israel's existence, *per se*, as an evil that should be eradicated by choking the country's economy—and a boycott directed at particular "political, social or economic acts, views or purpose." The latter language appears in a law protecting the immediate area around foreign embassies in the District of Columbia from picketing, and demonstrates that Congress is able to distinguish between opposition at large and disagreement with particular actions or policies.

A final distinction is both practical and moral. Representative Paul Sarbanes of Maryland—another of Scalia's law school classmates and a non-Jewish friend—challenged Scalia during the July 9 hearing, insisting that it was "beyond logic to drag in Nazi Germany in order to discredit this approach." He saw a common-sense difference, which may not be beyond the skill of legislative draftsmen, between a boycott directed toward a country whose practices violate fundamental human rights and a boycott of a friendly democracy. No matter how the lawyers slice it and how much they argue that statutory language might be extended to cover extreme situations, enforcement of the criminal law ultimately depends very much on the good sense of prosecutors. If the Holtzman bill were enacted in its present form, it would not be the only piece of federal legislation that might be read, by a sweeping interpretation of its terms, to cover conduct that the Congress did not intend to prohibit. A "rule of reason" would, one hopes, be applied in enforcement of this law by federal prosecutors (as it is in enforcement of the antitrust laws), and if the prosecutors fail, the judges can be counted on to make the difference.

Representative Holtzman's office seems stung, but not daunted, by the vigor of the administration's opposition. Her bill, they insist, is still alive and kicking, and additional hearings may be held when Congress comes back after Labor Day. Whether the dubious legal reasoning provided by the Justice Department cadre is the administration's true motive for opposing the legislation deserves more thorough inquiry. Assistant Attorney General Scalia may have revealed the real reason—that the State Department would prefer to leave this issue as an element in international negotiation—when he candidly said to the House subcommittee, "I myself believe that the most significant remedy which could be applied is by diplomatic pressures, rather than through the enactment of legislation, in order to prevent the Arabs from doing something that unduly constrains our citizens from taking legitimate action where they wish to do so."

No Choice But to Sell the Russians Grain

by Joel Solkoff

While Americans mined the entrance to Haiphong harbor and bombed railroad lines to prevent Soviet goods from entering North Vietnam, the Soviet Union reacted by secretly negotiating the sale of 19 million metric tons of American grain. Later that year, when the deal had become public and was already being called "The Great Grain Robbery," John Rarick, then a member of Congress, said to Earl Butz, who is still the Secretary of Agriculture, "As a farmboy, I can remember my dear old Hoosier grandmother telling me to watch out for some American businessmen, they will trade with the Devil if they can make a profit." Secretary Butz quipped, "If he has dollars."

Last month, memories of 1972 returned as the headlines reported the controversy surrounding the Soviet Union's mammoth new purchases of American grain. Longshoremen in Houston refused to load the wheat until a federal judge ordered them back to work.

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Irate wheat farmers met with President Ford, interrupting his golfing vacation in Vail, to tell him that they depend upon exports for survival. The price of food in July rose at an annual rate of 22.4 percent for the second month in a row. AFL-CIO President George Meany blamed the 10.3 million metric tons of Soviet grain purchases for rising food costs, warning consumers of "more bad news." In July a bag of groceries that last year cost a resident of Washington, DC $10, cost $13.90. Secretary Butz blamed the featherbedding practices of union-working middlemen for much of the rise, but admitted that the Soviet grain sales would cost Americans 1.5 percent in additional food costs.

When it is all over, the Russian wheat deal of 1975—in which more corn has been sold than wheat—may be considerably larger than 1972. The principal difference is that in 1972 the United States did not have to sell grain to Russia; in 1975 we do. The wheat deal of '72 changed American agriculture dramatically and probably irreversibly. In one quick and unexpected move, surplus became scarcity. No longer was the government paying high storage costs—which at one point ran to more than a million dollars a day. Instead the government sold all the wheat and corn it had in storage and then it sold all the storage bins. No longer are farmers paid not to grow. By 1973 President Nixon had signed a new agricultural act—passed by a Democratic Congress that was unaware of its implications—and because of the Secretary of Agriculture's enthusiasm for exports, Butz boasted that 50 million acres that had been lying fallow were put into production. Today we have a policy that insiders in the department call "wall to wall farming." This year's wheat crop is the largest in American history, and the corn crop may set a record too.

On August 20 Butz, who is the most powerful Secretary of Agriculture since Henry A. Wallace, gave a speech in which he explained that America's new farm policy is designed to meet the food needs of the world's exploding population. "By the year 2000, if we continue to multiply at present rates, there will be between 6.5 to seven billion people living on earth. This means in the next two-and-a-half decades we must learn how to feed as many people as we have learned to feed since the dawn of history. Even now, we aren't feeding the 3.9 billion nearly as well as we should."

In 1933 Henry Wallace changed American agriculture by implementing the farm programs that the Great Depression had made necessary. Earl Butz has been changing American agriculture by destroying the programs Wallace had implemented. Butz—whose predecessor, Nixon-appointee Clifford Hardin, took over Butz's seat on the Ralston Purina Board—is an extremely clever man and he has not always bothered about legal niceties. He talks about feeding the hungry while his policies make it even more difficult to do.

While the participants may be talking about bread, they are thinking about meat. In 1972 the Russians had a choice. Their political leaders could renege on their promise to increase the protein content of the Soviet diet and slaughter the stock of their developing livestock industry. Or they could feed their livestock American corn and soybeans and Soviet wheat, using the superior American wheat for making bread. The political leaders were reluctant to tell their people that they must be content to continue eating grain, potatoes and beets. However, in order to increase their meat supply, they were required to do something their agriculture was unable to do—produce bumper crops year in and year out in order to feed the livestock. That is why, three years later, the Russians are back on the world grain market with even larger needs, causing prices to skyrocket by the sudden and unexpected manner in which they make their purchases. In 1972, when weather interfered with their plans, the Russians were able to take advantage of political circumstances in the United States and buy a quarter of our wheat crop and much of our corn and soybeans.

Richard Nixon needed détente. His foreign policy required that while fighting a war in Indochina aimed at preventing the spread of Soviet influence, he convince the American public that he was simultaneously easing Cold War tensions. He had to give the Russians something that would make it worth their while to ignore such provocations as the mining of Haiphong harbor. At the same time, domestically, his Secretary of Agriculture was eager to pursue his policy of "getting the government out of agriculture." Perhaps there was some hope that farmers would not realize what they had lost—at least until after the election—and would vote for an administration that had raised farm prices.

The Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) loaned the Russians the money under extremely favorable credit arrangements. The Russians used the money to make secret transactions with private grain trading firms. The US government—unlike other countries—does not have the legal authority to export commodities. That can only be done by private companies. America's grain trade is dominated by six multinational corporations with monopolistic power similar to the Canadian Wheat Board and the Soviet Union's ministry of agriculture; only the power of the big six is greater and they operate for private rather than public interest. The companies sold the Soviet Union grain that they had purchased from the Government's CCC storage bins and from American farmers. This grain was sold to the Russians at prices significantly lower than the domestic price and the companies were paid the difference by the US government—$160 million in subsidies. Meanwhile the grain companies—operating on tips provided by former employees who had become Agriculture Department

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officials (the companies and the department work like a revolving door)—made a fortune on what was in effect an unregulated commodity futures market. At the same time, the Soviet Union—acting like stereotyped capitalist businessmen—had been quietly buying up shipping space, so that when the deal was announced freight rates skyrocketed. By subcontracting their excess space, the Russians earned the equivalent of a free ride for their 19 million tons. Having raised world prices, the Soviet Union, according to some reports, was exporting some of the formerly cheap American grain.

The effect on American agriculture was devastating. Most farmers were unable to take advantage of rising prices because by the time the secret transactions had become public knowledge they had already sold their grain for a fraction of its value. In 1973 and again in 1974 retail food prices rose over 14 percent. The Secretary of Agriculture's fond of saying that the percentage of American disposable income spent on food is the lowest in the world. In 1971 the figure was 15.8 percent. Today it is 17.2 percent. The basis of America's farm policy is orderly marketing. The policy, an antiquated system of incredible complexity, had remained essentially unchanged since 1933. The system had numerous faults, but public officials—who view the public as unable to deal with complicated subjects—were reluctant to reform a system that basically was giving the farmer a decent income and was providing the consumer with adequate supplies at reasonable prices. Suddenly the element of predictability was gone, and there was no model for dealing with the economics of scarcity.

". . . and this area is known as the Bread Basket of the USSR."

The Russian wheat deal left the United States without reserves. The price of feed was going up. The price of raising livestock reached record levels. Production costs were exacerbated by the sudden and unexpected rise in the price of oil. Petroleum is the largest single raw material used in the production of food. In the past year the price of petroleum-based fertilizer more than doubled. Farmers were undergoing what the National Farmers Union calls a "boom and bust" economy. Scarcity meant that even though farmers were getting higher prices than they had ever received, they were having trouble breaking even. Users of raw materials—bakers, clothing manufacturers, confectioners—were taking advantage of the chaotic situation generated by the Russian sale to raise retail prices, citing the increased cost of raw materials as an excuse even at times when the cost of raw materials was decreasing. For example the price of bread rose about 10 percent from February of 1974 to June of this year, while wheat prices dropped 45 percent. The public blamed the farmer for the high cost of food. The Department of Agriculture was successful in disseminating confusing and inaccurate information in order to build popular support against farm programs. The programs, which despite their faults would have provided some protection to both farmers and consumers, were destroyed, dismantled, changed or simply not enforced by the Department of Agriculture.

The events of the last three years put farmers in the position that they not only have to sell grain to the Soviet Union, but regard the Russians as guardian angels. With encouragement from the Department of Agriculture, they had expanded acreage to the point that farmers have to export two-thirds of their wheat, one-quarter of their corn, and over half their soybeans. The grain has to be sold to cash markets. While Earl Butz talks about feeding the hungry, he has been reducing the food available to famine-stricken nations in the world through the Food for Peace program. Likewise he has deliberately made it unthinkable for farmers to sell to the government to build up currently nonexistent reserves for years of scarcity or to feed the hungry. The only real protection wheat farmers currently have would be the administration-approved $1.37 per bushel (formally called a "defaulted nonrecourse loan") paid by the CCC and resulting in such government-owned reserves. However since production costs are about three dollars, it's not a practical recourse.

In April a member of the House Agriculture Committee staff predicted, "Unless Butz does something to raise wheat and corn prices, he will be

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driven out of office." A spokesman for the Department of Agriculture told me, "Farmers sat on a razor blade this year. Frankly there was some sweat on foreheads here in the early part of July." The administration was gambling on the longshot that farmers would be able to export to some unforeseen cash market. Otherwise they could not even hope to meet production costs. To make matters worse, a major scandal hit the Department of Agriculture, resulting in scores of indictments of licensed grain inspectors, with inspectors pleading guilty to bribery and theft. Two of the major grain trading firms were indicted for the widespread practice of exporting soybeans, wheat and corn containing insects and dirt, and short of weight. As late as June the *Des Moines Register* reported, "Because American grain frequently arrives in a dirty and broken condition, Europeans are increasingly turning to Brazil, Argentina and other nations . . . even though prices there often are higher. . . ." Farmers were becoming more and more worried that in a competitive international grain market they would lose out. Then, like the cavalry, the Russians came to the rescue.

The rescue could not be kept secret for long. This time, because of a law passed in the wake of 1972, the grain trading companies were required to announce within 24 hours their July negotiations with the Soviet Union to sell 10.3 million metric tons of grain. Staggering estimates followed on how much the Soviets need to help make up their crop shortfall. Even after buying from the rest of the world, they are expected to be in the market for up to 11 million additional tons of American corn and wheat. That does not include soybean purchases, which cannot be anticipated until next month when the fate of the Russians' oil-producing sunflower crop will be better known. Fears that America would be unable to compete favorably in world markets were forgotten. The US dominates world grain exports even more than the Arabs dominate petroleum exports. As if in answer to administration prayers, first came the Russians and then the news that bad weather reduced world grain production. The longshot appeared to pay off.

The reason for the gamble had nothing at all to do with concern for feeding the hungry. Rather there was the necessity to pay for the increased cost of petroleum imports. Agricultural exports have become America's number one form of foreign exchange, helping to offset our balance of payments deficit. In short, even though it will mean higher food costs, we have to export in order to help pay for gasoline. Then Gerald Ford listened to other advice and forced his Secretary of Agriculture to do something he regarded as anathema. On August 3, Secretary Butz announced that he was asking the grain companies to stop selling to the Russians. The ostensible purpose was to await news on the size of the US corn crop. On August 11 the suspension was reiterated. The administration had come late to the realization that in 1976 the voters will blame high food prices on the Republicans.

Also the longshoremen have to be appeased (or fooled) so that they will continue to load Russian-bound ships. The unions have been watching as the American merchant marine is being destroyed by Russian and other cut-rate foreign flag vessels. They were angered by the President's veto of a bill that would require 30 percent of imported oil to sail on American ships. George Meany was using rising food prices as a blind to support the International Longshoremen's Association's refusal to load Russian grain. Meany perceived that in its eagerness to seek warmer relations with the Russians—and hopefully get disarmament concessions—the spirit of détente meant that the administration is willing to sell American grain for less than it is worth. Meany is trying to exact from the Russians the cost of saving America's merchant marine.

Already fortunes are being made and lost on the futures market. Because of its failure to prevent the wheat market from being manipulated in 1972, Congress took the authority out of the Department of Agriculture. The infant Commodity Futures Trading Commission may be hard pressed to prevent irregularities. It is so new that it has yet to decide which commodities to regulate. Rep. Neal Smith (D, Iowa) has accused Butz of leaking valuable information. The futures market is operating on the assumption that we will sell the Russians more grain. However the price of American grain is lower than it would be without the suspension. When Butz lifts the suspension—as he is almost certain to do—the Russians will get a cheaper price. Once again our sometime adversaries will get a very good deal, and the American consumer will pay still higher food prices—especially for meat—not only because of the sale, but because of the suspension. The farmer, who—despite administration boasts—is not growing as much as possible because of the unpredictability of the market, will get less income. By "getting the government out of agriculture," Earl Butz has handed American agricultural regulation over to the large grain trading companies and to the Russians. The administration recognizes that its halfhearted attempt to regain control will fail. The President has said publicly that he expects to resume the sales.

In the absence of a food policy and an energy policy, the United States must continue to make meat eaters of the rest of the world. Whether it is good for Americans to continue to consume meat and petroleum as we have been and to export our expensive habits in order to keep them is an interesting ethical question. Whether it makes economic sense, is a matter that the Republican administration and the Democratic Congress refuse to consider. Our grain exports will almost certainly postpone consideration until the answer becomes clearer and our choices become even more limited. Meanwhile living will continue to cost more.

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Arts and Lives

Stanley Kauffmann on films

Kings and Dancekings

King Lear (Artkino). Going to a film of Shakespeare is, for me, like being eight years old again, dressed in my Sunday suit, being taken to Culture. I know that what's going on up there is weighty, and I wish it were doing more to me. This has happened to me in the two dozen or so Shakespeare films I've seen, including Forbes-Robertson's *Hamlet* (1913). From all of this experience I've drawn a small treasury of pleasures: some of John Barrymore's inflections as Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, bits of Gielgud's Cassius in *Julius Caesar*, Olivier's wooing scene in *Henry V*, Felix Aylmer's Polonius in Olivier's *Hamlet*, the opening witch scene in Polanski's *Macbeth*. But, as the Russian *King Lear* proves again, there *cannot* (repeat: CANNOT) be a good film of Shakespeare.

Naturally I wish there were soundfilms of all the great productions I have read about, but they would function as records of the theater, not as films. Language is far from the sworn enemy of film, but when they collide, film wins; and when the drama is *in* the language and in the dramaturgic shape commanded by the language, film is bound to be hurtful. All of that wandering around castles and countrysides and into "real" battles might just as well be founded on Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*.

When the film is in a foreign language, the rewards are even skimpier. I have seen theater productions of Shakespeare in translation, and even when I could only follow lamely after the words, I got something of the shape of lines and speeches and saw the production responding in its own way to the shapes demanded by the language. But a foreign-language Shakespeare film, with synoptic subtitles, only compounds distances.

Grigory Kozintsev made his *King Lear* in the USSR in 1970-71 (about the same time that Peter Brook was making his differently unsatisfactory version with Paul Scofield). Kozintsev, a very experienced theater and film director, had previously filmed *Hamlet*, which I missed. The very first shot of this *Lear* sets the tenor and viewpoint: we see rag-wrapped peasant feet moving over muddy ground in gray light. This tells us at once what the very last shot of the film is going to be: we're going to see the suffering People carrying on, and Lear's story will have been framed between. (Which is how it turns out.) The shot is also prophetic in the way that it sets the visual texture of the film: gray, candid, revealing of the texture of wood and burlap and skin. It's the filmic equivalent of the realistic Shakespeare that held the stage in the second half of the 19th century. The cinematography by Jonas Gricius is, as such, excellent.

As for the cast, there is a Kent who looks and sounds like Kent, and an Edmund who does the same for Edmund; but the Goneril looks like Edmund's ancient aunt and, if sane, could hardly have expected to hold him; the Regan is grotesquely fat and has a bosom that would stop a Sherman tank; the Cordelia has a face like a round piece of dough ready for the oven. And there are two bits of bad luck. The shaven-headed Fool looks like a parody of Falconetti at the end of Dreyer's *Joan*, and, worst of all, the Lear himself (Yuri Jarvet) is almost a dead ringer for the night-club comedian "Professor" Irwin Corey.

None of this would matter, obviously, if the film made some connection with the tragedy, with the idea of tragedy, but, to cite just one failure, this is so slight a Lear that his fracture because he is denied royal attendance becomes a matter of irritated ego rather than a metaphor for the disprizing of dignity and the corruption of regard.

This crumbly little king, less impressive than the Gloucester, wanders out into a pretty good storm attended by a Fool who is played like the quintessential Russian village idiot. The best aspect of a film of *Lear* is that the thunder can really rumble and yet Lear can be heard, can even vary and grow. That, at least, is true here. But then Kozintsev decides to fatten up the hovel scene by filling it full of madmen, so that when Lear takes refuge with Edgar-as-Tom, the room looks like *The Lower Depths* prefigured.

Technically, the film is made well enough: the camera glides and curves deftly. The music by the late Shostakovich is strong, except for some ugly tootling on the Fool's flute. But one watches the whole thing, scene by condensed scene, simply measuring how close or far it is to or from the play. It never engulfs—not even in the most visceral moments, like the blinding of Gloucester. As for the scene that may be the most exquisite ever written, the remeeting of Lear and Cordelia, it is dissipated and flat. (Just before it, some apparently moronic attendants have wheeled the unconscious Lear on a cart right through a raging battle.)

The very end, in which the peasants are putting out the fires of the nobles' war, tells us, I suppose, that the People endure, after the kings have had their day—just the way John Steinbeck and Carl Sandburg said. This seems to me precisely wrong. *Lear* is not an anti-aristocratic play about the troubles of, and caused by, a remote breed of beings called kings. If *Lear* isn't about me, it's not about anything.

W.W. and the Dixie Dancekings (20th Century-Fox). Forgive a reversal that is a platitude by now, but I think that this is a better film than *King Lear*. It's flawed and unsatisfactory, but it does have some breeze and life and what it has of them comes from its rightness on the screen. This does not imply that the screen is limited by comparison with the stage, only that great plays on screen are limited.

Burt Reynolds is W.W., a casual,

(continued on page 33)

Films Worth Seeing

Love and Death. Napoleon in Russia meets defeat and Woody Allen. The latter's best film so far, less forced and frantic than before, more fun-fulfilled.

Monty Python and the Holy Grail. Arthurian legend tossed in a busy blanket. Lots of likable lunacy bursting occasionally into laughs.

Nashville. The country-music scene as America in not-so-little. Smooth and clever enough, less deep than it wants us to think it.

Smile. It's redundant to satirize beauty contests. But the cast and Michael Ritchie's direction are good.

SK

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Pavel Kohout is a Czech playwright whose work has been widely produced in Europe. On June 9, 1975 he sent the following open letter in care of his friends Heinrich Boll and Arthur Miller "To the Writers' Organization of the countries whose governments are participating in the Conference for European Security and Cooperation." Kohout's letter is published here with the kind permission of Mr. Miller.

Dear Heinrich Boll, Dear Arthur Miller:

I am addressing myself to you—as my personal friends who know who I am and what I think and who as important authors have done their share to prevent today's world from being in worse shape than it is—in order to address myself through your mediation to all my colleagues in the so-called West and the so-called East.

I do not intend to write a political manifesto or a complaint; all I could say in this respect has already been said by me or others of my fellow citizens. I do not want to pour more oil on the fire of the discussions but to find a way out of a situation which is not only Czech, having sprung from a social movement and a power conflict of the kind history has always produced, produces now and is going to produce.

Dozens of Czech and Slovak writers have lived and worked in the past seven years under conditions which are a consequence of the year 1968. Regardless of whether our participation in those events will be judged positively or negatively, one thing is known to all: our actions neither violated laws nor the ethical standards of writers. We have engaged ourselves in the defense of ideas which temporarily are being suppressed by the people in power, and that is all.

It is not to be regarded as a special favor that the current reprisals are limited to short arrests, surveillances, wiretapping, interrogations and house searches. It is rather that even the power of the state knows how difficult it would be to prove before the world and the nation that we committed punishable actions. Although we were accused of having committed the most absurd sins there was nothing we could do but stay home and continue working.

One would expect that the government would consider such action as a sign of good will when even in our state of disgrace we try to participate in the development of the national culture, especially since this government daily announces the united support of the entire population, even more so when those in difficulties include the majority of the well-known intellectuals and artists, who are clearly not enemies of the aims but of the methods used.

After seven years we and the government have come full circle. We suffer the fate of those who have been silenced. The government suffers the shame of the silencer if it offers as the only way out (and this only to a few) the offer of a passport. This offer not only suspends the Damocles sword of the loss of citizenship (which can be decided without one's own participation) but is also a violent uprooting from one's homeland, and is really only another way of silencing. In this encounter there are neither victors nor losers, only the defeated, those who couldn't stand it physically and those who could not stand it spiritually. Their humble self-criticisms, even if dictated by the most humanly understandable desire to be able to publish again, or to make it possible for the children to study—are the saddest of all. A grown-up man who denies in one single declaration to the press everything he has stood for in his life and work, loses in one single moment the esteem of his friends, his readers and, above all, of those in power because they know best what caused this "insight" and what its proper weight is. The final consequence is the person's loss of self-esteem or his turning to cynicism. But which would be preferable?

Some writers, amongst them myself, have the good luck to be able, because of various circumstances, to go on legally publishing their works outside Czechoslovakia. Lucky circumstances insofar as these writers are still stimulated by a live confrontation with the world and also by their having less material worries, in spite of hard discriminating measures. But considering the original meaning of literature which is the product of a certain place and community, our fate is not different from those who are only writing for the desk drawer.

If there are too many desk drawers and the things are forced to be kept in them too long a time without hope of any change, then the consequence is a serious disturbance in the structure not only of literature but the entirety of national culture. This is the more dangerous if it is reinforced by a continuing development of technology and a proliferation of consumer society, as is demonstrated in the profound analysis by Vaclav Havel contained in an open letter of April 1975 to Dr. Gustáv Husák which I call to your attention.

Both of you are well acquainted with our situation, you were eye witneses to its birth and development. You therefore are well aware that we did stay true to our convictions but that we limited ourselves exclusively to a defense against the more outrageous injustices.

I have concentrated everything toward one goal: to continue writing and create a legal possibility for at least the most elementary confrontation amongst writers and the circle of readers closest to me. In this age of rotation presses and the most modern communications techniques, dozens of grown-up and well-known writers are forced to behave as though in their student years: we exchange typewritten copies of manuscripts or leave them with interested readers at cost. This is not an illegal activity since each copy has been signed by the author but it is also no students' prank. These free editions amount today to about 50 titles by about 30 authors. In order to be able to share reflections about current affairs—a possibility which was once offered to us by newspapers—we started to regularly write feuilletons and to send them to each other; about spring, about Easter, about the global diminution of raw materials and food, about the beginnings of human culture. These texts which were not anonymous have rapidly gained a wide circulation thus contradicting the insinuation that all these authors were rejected by the nation.

The era of innocence for this manuscript literature ended in April of this year when teams of state security men started in the course of house searches of a number of my colleagues and other citizens to be most concerned with the impounding of all typed manuscripts. The culmination was the removal of unfinished works, among them a thou-

COMING

Irving Howe
on Isaac Rosenberg

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sand pages of philosophical notes by Karel Kosik. This event shook me profoundly. I had expected that my colleagues would at least receive an answer when they requested the return of unfinished manuscripts from the authorities. Since this still has not happened I have to feel myself as much in danger as those who are already victims. Does this not create a kind of precedence permitting the police from now on to enter everywhere and take everything? Shall I from now on write each page of plays with a copy to be hidden in the evening in different hiding places?

Thus the following devilish circle is completed: according to the government only the person who writes and publishes is a professional writer. Formerly, in order to prevent anybody who incurred the displeasure of those in power from becoming such a writer, his work was simply forbidden publication, but now manuscripts are impounded in order to make writing itself impossible.

I therefore send this letter and ask the following questions:

1) Is it possible that one who merits the description of writer, will not think and write about the conflict in his society even if his opinions are different from those who are in power at a given moment? In doing this does he commit a crime against the state?

2) Has any government that signed the Charter of Human Rights the right to force an artist to be silent as an artist when he is not guilty in the eyes of the law, but solely of unofficial thinking? Is one allowed to deprive him of the possibility to publish even in the most primitive form, the typewritten copy of his own works?

3) Has such a government the right to impound the manuscript on which the author is still working and that has not even been circulated in the typed version? What's the difference between such a manuscript and the thought alone?

4) Is it possible in this modern world where each inflicted measure of punishment is more or less in relation to the crime and where even the criminals after serving their sentences are reincorporated into common life, to ban an author or a great part of literature for an unlimited time?

5) Is this apartheid or not?

6) Can cultural organizations of the world, including UNESCO, simply ignore such a state of affairs?

7) Is it possible for European cooperation in the cultural sector to gain any perspective of reality without overcoming similar situations and without creating guarantees to prevent their repetition?

8) Is culture the possession of the nation and the state, as are the territory and the army, or is it the property of mankind, as are the laws of physics and the atmosphere?

We live in the time in which not only artists and scientists but also statesmen are inclined to think that disputes should not be solved by force but by negotiation. The preparations of the Conference for European Security and Cooperation in themselves are proof of this. We also witness the fact that statesmen more and more engage themselves in solving conflicts which do not directly concern only their countries out of the belief that peace is indivisible and belongs to all.

I am of the opinion that culture, too, is indivisible and belongs to all.

I not only grew up with Hasek and Capek but also with Stendhal and Mayakowsky and as dramatic authors with Dürrenmatt and Shaw. The Czech, Jan Neruda, lent his name to the great Chilean poet. Kafka from Prague influenced world literature as few others have. Why, therefore, should writers who at this moment are not yet plagued by the problems of their colleagues *not* engage themselves to work for their solution?

The situation of the Czech and Slovak literature cries out for such a mission. Could you, dear Mr. Böll and Mr. Miller, together with other colleagues from different countries whose governments are at this moment at the European Security Conference, come to Prague and Bratislava to listen to the most divergent points of view and to try and work out a modus vivendi also for all future similar situations? A government that is honestly working for the peaceful solution of bloody disputes between governments of different social orders can not possibly adhere to the opposite principles if it concerns an unbloody dispute between groups and citizens with different points of view.

And if such an attempt failed, would it not be possible to organize through the initiatives of the writers and the organizations a European or a world conference dealing with the mission of culture in an epoch which stresses the consumer society and technology and to try and find an efficient solution of the conflict between culture and power constantly arising in different parts of the world? If we couldn't be present personally we would at least participate with our written contributions to the discussions, even from afar.

Our predecessors, the Czech and Slovak writers between the two World Wars, Communists like Kisch and Democrats like Capek, did everything in their power to help the Nazi-menaced German culture. For long years, with expressions of sympathy as well as concrete acts, my generation also helped all colleagues who tried in difficult times to maintain the continuity of their national culture, Be it at home, as victims of McCarthyism, or in the Czech emigration: I met Pablo Neruda and I was a friend of Nazim Hikmet. Don't we now too deserve friendly advice and help—Socialists in a Socialist country, even if we do not fight for our lives (thanks to a historic shift) but only for the right to be the writers that we are?

It remains to explain, dear Böll and Miller, why I address this open letter meant for so many people to you two. The reason is that lately employees of the accredited foreign press agencies in

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Prague have gone over to the side of the local power which is trying to cut us off from normal communication with the world. To avoid difficulties (God knows on whose initiative) they have reached an agreement amongst themselves as to how they will transmit our texts abroad—either all will do so or none will: They obviously prefer the latter alternative even if with this action they jeopardize the sense of their reporters' mission. They have created a second barrier of censorship more absurd even than the first one.

I therefore have no other means than to look for a new way to ask you, my two friends whom I esteem as authors as well as human beings, to make my letter and my questions in whatever way you deem suitable known to your colleagues, authors' organizations and the culturally interested public of the countries participating in the European Conference which I mentioned in the beginning. I take this step not only for myself; I do it in the conviction that this is a serious matter that concerns you and everybody else.

Pavel Kohout

Books Considered

The Russian Tradition by Tibor Szamuely

(McGraw-Hill; $12.50)

One is tempted to judge the late Tibor Szamuely's account of the Russian experience in the same way that Michael Katkov judged the advice given by his contemporary and friend Konstantin Pobedonostsev to Tsar Alexander III. "Pobedonostsev," wrote Katkov, "remained true to himself, shrugged his shoulders, lamented, and raised his hands to heaven . . ." But the temptation passes as one reads more deeply into Szamuely's masterwork. Pobedonostsev had confessed, in his *Reflections of a Russian Statesman*, that it is easier to understand the Voice of God than the Russian *narod* and their history—a fact which explains why, in the end, after his policies had failed, he was forced to resort to raising his hands to heaven. Szamuely, who profoundly understood Mother Russia and her tradition—as well as the difficulty of conveying that tradition to non-Russians—knew that he had to look downwards, toward Hell in order to describe the true Russia; and he knew that to be an enterprise of great difficulty and danger. That he was singularly qualified for the job of explaining Russia to a Western Audience the reader of *The Russian Tradition* will quickly discover, for he had been moulded by that tradition, and never quite escaped its clutches, although he struggled manfully to do so.

Szamuely was never easy to pigeonhole or categorize, a failing that has caused much consternation among the British reviewers of *The Russian Tradition*. His life, he often joked, had proved a bad piece of casting, and he truly believed—usually after his fourth vodka—that his lines might be better delivered by a different actor. Yet he nevertheless managed to perform his unique role with great panache, almost convincing his audience that the part had in fact been created for him in the first place. His appearance belied his style and conduct—he was a short, plump Hungarian cosmopolite with a typically Magyar penchant for argument, who looked like a coffeehouse intellectual from Budapest but acted like the Vicar of Bray—but in the end one accepted him for what he wanted to be. And what he wanted to be, his style and appearance to the contrary, was an English gentleman. Although he possessed one of the finest historical minds of his generation, he preferred to be thought of as a typical English patriot rather than as a great historian. His Englishness, which was very old fashioned and very deep, became his most memorable quality, a quality clearly in evidence in the present volume.

He was a self-made Englishman of Gilbertian proportions who, like most real converts, came to cherish his adopted country with a zeal that few of his native-born compatriots were capable of equaling. At times his patriotic intensity was almost un-English. Still listening to his rapid conversation and reading his lucid essays, one could not help but think of him as anything else but the Englishman he had become. This despite the fact that he had only lived in England for eight years of his adult life, for he used those eight short years to establish himself as one of Britain's most captivating and controversial intellectuals. He was, at the time of his death in 1972, a celebrated professor at the University of Reading, a hugely successful journalist in both print and broadcasting and a moving spirit within the old boy network of the Conservative party.

Szamuely came to his position of eminence in Britain by way of a curious and unconventional route. His parents had both been prominent functionaries in the short-lived dictatorship of the Hungarian Communist Béla Kun, who fled to Russia after the regime's collapse in 1919. Szamuely was born in Moscow in 1925, where he was raised among the privileged children of the new Bolshevik aristocracy (Svetlana Stalin was one of his classmates) and treated as a Russian. With the exception of a brief stint at Bertrand Russell's famous Beacon Hill School during the mid-1930s—when his parents worked in the Soviet embassy in London—his entire education took place in Russia. As a devoted young Communist he readily accepted the harsh vicissitudes of life in Stalinist Russia, including the loss of his father, Gyorgi, who, like so many old Communists, perished in the great terror of the 1930s. He interrupted his education to serve in the Red army during World War II, where, one suspects, he first began to appreciate the significance of the Russian tradition. The war was his first sortie into the real Russia, and he often spoke fondly of the spirit of patriotism that existed in Russia during those days. "The *narod*," he later remarked, "were really rather decent chaps—very different from the blokes I knew in the Kremlin."

After the war he went on to the University of Moscow, where he took his doctorate and began his academic career. He remained, at least on the surface, a loyal Communist, in good standing with the Kremlin elite, although the war had changed his perspective about Russia. He was allowed all the privileges of a Soviet academician, including access to Western political journals. He later confessed that his wartime experiences, coupled with his exposure to non-Communist literature, led, ultimately, to his rejection of the ideology he had, for all intents and purposes, been baptized into—and to his eventual downfall and incarceration in Moscow's dread Lubyanka Prison. When the secret police broke into his Moscow flat to arrest him in 1949, they found him sitting at his desk, reading a copy of *Time* magazine, which featured the Hiss-Chambers's confrontation as its cover story.

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During the early 1950s Szamuely disappeared into the nightmare world of the gulag archipelago, where he endured the hardships of Ivan Denisovich and added to his understanding of Mother Russia. He would later speak of his experiences in the Vorkuta slave-labor camp in a stiff-upper-lipped, almost light-hearted manner, and would regale his English friends with funny stories about the stupidity of his warders. He would always preface one of his tales with the phrase, "You really have to understand the Russian mind to appreciate this story . . ." He was not enough of a Slavophile to describe the true horror of his experiences; and he was simply too English to bore his friends with stories of his own suffering. After the rise of Khrushchev he, along with many other minor political prisoners, was released from the labor camp and rehabilitated as part of the Politburo's de-Stalinization program. He was allowed to leave Russia for Hungary, where he resumed his academic career and became, in 1958, the vice chancellor of Budapest University. In 1964 the Hungarian authorities sent him to Ghana, which was then a pro-Communist dictatorship, to lecture on the virtues of Marxism. Shortly after being joined by his family in Africa, he hopped a plane for London and defected to the West.

Thanks to his amazing facility with languages—he spoke English without the slightest trace of an accent—he was rapidly assimilated into his new culture. During the few short years that were left him, he devoted the greater part of his time to his teaching duties and to political journalism. His many academic admirers would have preferred it had Szamuely devoted less time to the ephemeral enterprise of journalism and public controversy, and more time to serious scholarship, but this was more of a lament than a criticism, since it was generally agreed that he was a brilliant journalist, rather like Walter Bagehot (whom he greatly admired), whose journalism was destined to survive. It was also generally agreed that Szamuely wrote some of the finest English political prose of our time during this period, and even his most casual pieces possessed special qualities of style and learning that could be found no place else in British journalism. So far as "serious" scholarship was concerned, it was widely known that Szamuely had been engaged for some time in writing a major scholarly work about Russia which, it was believed, would firmly establish him as Britain's premier historian of Russia.

At the time of his death he had completed his work, although he had not revised it. Now, thanks to the editorial efforts of his friend, the distinguished poet-historian Robert Conquest, we have his book, *The Russian Tradition*, in a form and style that, I believe, would have satisfied Szamuely's high standards. The book is unique because Szamuely's perspective was unique; he knew and understood the Russian mind as only an insider could, yet he could write about Russia in a disinterested manner that only an outsider could achieve. Szamuely converted, as it were, to Western civilization, yet, like so many Westernized Russians (and at one time most Russian intellectuals were completely Westernized) he continued to revel in the genius of his lost Russianess. Unlike most Westernized Russian intellectuals, however, he was not a Westernizer, in the Russian sense of the word; he knew too much about Russian history since the days of Peter the Great to believe that the implacable Russian tradition could ever succumb to Western civilization. At the same time, however, he refused to accept the mythology of the Slavophiles (lately revived by Alexander Solzhenitsyn), and the Slavophile concept of an organically pure Russia, ruled by the *zemskii sobor* (the assembly of the land), in pre-Petrine Moscovy.

To understand Russia, Szamuely argues in the present volume, one must begin by accepting her for what she is, and rejecting the nostrums of those who would see her different. Only then can one come to terms with the Russian tradition, a tradition that both dominates and transcends Russian history, reaching its brutal apotheosis under communism. Since the first Russian intellectuals began to ponder their country's ethos, there has existed within Russia a recognition that the nation was merely in Europe, but not of it. "Yes," wrote the poet Alexander Blok, "—we are Scythians! Yes—we are Asiatics, with slanting and rapacious eyes!" The 19th century philosopher, Pyotre Chaadaev, who was at various times both a Slavophile and a Westernizer, lamented that Russia was "an oriental despotism supported by an oriental cult." Although Russia is a border state, the European frontier with Asia—a fact that has shaped Russian history and made Russians both Asian and European, and yet non-European and non-Asian at the same time—she has, in the words of Plekhanov, moved further and further away from Europe and nearer and nearer the Orient over the centuries. "By the time that . . . Russian Europe finally succeeded in defeating nomadic Asia," Plekhanov concluded, "her own socio-political relationships had become very similar to those prevailing in the Asiatic despotisms." To alter the old proverb slightly, if one scratches a Russian one will, to be sure, find a Tartar—but one will also find a kind of vestigial European.

For centuries, as Szamuely notes, this paradox has prevented Russians from properly coming to grips with their own tradition, which they believed, in some cases, to be beyond elucidation. Russia, wrote Tyutchev in a famous poem, cannot be fathomed by the mind; she "has a stature all her own—Russia can be but *believed in*." Even in the darkest days of Russian history, when the country was ruled by such monsters as Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great and Stalin, the attitude described by Tyutchev manifested itself at all levels of Russian society. Not only did Russia *have* to be believed in, it *was* believed in, even by the most sophisticated of Russians. Russian history, as Szamuely reminds us, is a litany of horrors, and yet Russians seem to have viewed those horrors as purgatorial experiences that somehow supplied them with a special grace that placed them above the rest of mankind. This special grace, this sense of being God's elect, is the essence of what Szamuely calls the "Russian idea," the exotic amalgam of emotions that gave the Russians the feeling of "belonging to a nation set apart."

The "Russian idea" was made up of many elements: devotion to the Orthodox Church, which was more spiritual , and more Christian than any other form of Christianity; faith in the "system of autocracy whereby prince and people were fused together into a single integral entity"; the principle of *sobornost* (communality), which placed the collective whole of society above the individual; "the conviction that suffering was inseparable from purity, and that the Russian people's centuries-long ordeal had been a cleansing fire, from which they were to emerge with enhanced virtue and spirituality." These are but some of the aspects of the "Russian idea," as described by Szamuely, but they go a long way in explaining why, despite all their terrible suffering, the Russians continue to view their country as something very special. To put it more plainly, they shed a great deal of light on why the Russian people have

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always stood ready to defend the motherland—however horribly it has been governed—against its enemies. Without the "Russian idea," Szamuely suggests, the victory at Stalingrad could never have been achieved. It is an attitude of mind, that, as Szamuely demonstrates with his numerous quotations from foreign observers of the Russian scene, is beyond the ken of the non-Russian. The suffering of the Russian people is the great strength of the Russian tradition.

For Russia, Szamuely reminds us, the time of troubles did not end, as the history books tell us, in 1613. The Russian tradition is one vast time of troubles, and one cannot understand Russia without appreciating this fact. Szamuely begins this book by recounting the reactions of two distinguished French intellectuals to Russia. In 1839 the Marquis de Custine, a devoted Royalist whose father and grandfather had both died on the guillotine, went to Russia "to seek for arguments against representative government." He was well received wherever he went, and was even honored by the tsar who granted him several audiences. But he returned from Russia a bitter enemy of the tsarist autocracy. "The political system of Russia may be defined in one sentence," Custine wrote. "[It] is a country in which the government says what it pleases, because it alone has the right to speak . . ." Almost a hundred years later, in 1936, Andre Gide, a literary champion of the new Revolutionary Russia, followed in Custine's steps. He wanted to see a land "where Utopia was in the process of becoming a reality." Everywhere Gide went he was acclaimed as a friend of the revolution. He was given many honors, including the distinct honor of standing next to the Kremlin leaders on top of Lenin's tomb. Yet like Custine before him, Gide was horrified by what he saw. "In the USSR," he wrote, ". . . on any and every subject there can be only one opinion . . . And he who strays from the path had better beware!"

The Russian Tradition is an important book, and it deserves the attention of all serious readers. One can only lament that we will have no more books from its brilliant author. His book on the English tradition, which was his first love, would have been even more exciting than the present volume.

Peter P. Witonski

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Welcome to Hard Times by E.L. Doctorow

(Random House; $8.95, $3.95 paper)

Random House has just reissued E.L. Doctorow's first novel, *Welcome to Hard Times*, originally published in 1960 by Simon and Shuster: and a good thing too—because, quite frankly, it is a superb piece of fiction: lean and mean, and thematically significant. It is a Western, of all things, resembling Doctorow's current best seller *Ragtime* in that it is a well-wrought American parable which has the feel of both fiction and history.

Like the detective story, the Western is a serious genre, although it has only recently been taken seriously. A Philadelphia lawyer, Owen Wister, put the genre together. A graduate of St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, and of Harvard, where he took a BA in 1882 *summa cum laude* and a law degree, Wister languished for a while with the prestigious Philadelphia firm of Ralston and Rawle. In 1885 he visited Wyoming for his health, staying in Cheyenne with Eastern friends active in the Wyoming Stock Growers Association. Wister's West was not the West of a protagonist, but that of an outside observer, based in the Harvard-West elegance of the Cheyenne Club. He took to the countryside on guided hunting trips like an Englishman on safari. In 1891 Wister began turning out Western fiction, using material he had gathered from 15 trips he made from Philadelphia between 1893 and 1900.

Wister at first saw the cowboy as a nomadic picaro, "without any moral sense whatever." Characters like Specimen Jones and Lin McLean in Wister's 1890s fiction for *Harper's Magazine* represent the West an an arena of lovable low-life as perceived by a cultivated Easterner. The Easterner tolerated and was amused by the cowboy picaro, viewing him from the point of view on his own secure sense of caste. In *Lin McLean* (1898), however, Wister sent his cowboy East, and played off his good qualities against Eastern deficiencies, effecting a transitional use of the picaro figure. Such, of course, is a common technique in literary satire: to endow a socially inferior character with the tools to judge a higher but delinquent social order. The lower character often becomes the repository of lost value, if and when an older orthodoxy crumbles. By the *Virginian*, published in 1902, Wister's cowboy-protagonist has made the transition from picaresque to heroic.

Like Frank Norris and Jack London, Wister envisioned the story of the frontier as an Anglo-Saxon hero. Thus late in the 19th century, Wister wrote, "was the race once again subjected to battles and darkness, rain and shine, to the fierceness and generosity of the desert. Destiny tried her latest experiment upon the Saxon, and plucking him from the library, the haystack, and the gutter, set him upon his horse; then it was that, face to face with the eternal simplicity of death, his modern guise fell away and showed once again the medieval man." Pervading this first fully resolved Western is a sense of political order under threat. East and West, Wister implies, old America had better unite in the face of immigration's threat to American values. This novel by a Philadelphia lawyer about a Southerner and a New Englander in Wyoming was composed in symbolic Charleston, South Carolina, considered by Wister "an oasis in our. . . . desert of mongrel din and haste."

Wister consolidated the formula for the Western: the quasi-anonymous hero, the loner outside civilization,

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**The Kirkus Reviews*

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incorporates civilization's highest consciousness and values. Within the context of a doomed social order, he battles evil in solitary conflict. In the early 20th century Zane Grey, Clarence Mulford, Bertha Sinclair, Dane Coolidge, William MacLeod Raine and Rex Beach standardized the genre for the mass market, a large amount of Western fiction being published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, the magazine of small-town Protestant America.

New York dentist Zane Grey became the von Hindenburg of the sub-literary Western, writing more than 60 books, selling over 13 million copies. (*Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912) alone sold 750,000 copies.) One pays attention to Grey and the other practitioners of the Western out of sociological ambitions; to the left or to the right of the Western, book or film, are valuable clues of American identity. Only recently have such things been studied, and the clues are yet to be construed, although the genre's violence and racism are easily apparent. There's something of the pastoral there, something feudal in code, capitalist in ambition, wth a built-in nostrum for failure.

But the more development of the genre becomes a matter of sociology, it would seem to preclude literature. Bernard DeVoto has pointed out that the Western's heavy and fixed formula discouraged serious writers. It was also so lowbrow, socially and intellectually. After all, if Henry James had trouble with the thinness of the Atlantic seaboard, what could anyone do with the social simplicity of Western life? Yet from the first, better-than-dreadful writers like Stewart Edward White, Eugene Manlove Rhodes and Hamlin Garland worked in the genre. Andy Adams's *The Log of a Cowboy*, published a year after *The Virginian*, provided an example of the genre being used as the occasion for straightforward, honest writing, and restrained celebration. Telling the story of a longhorn drive from the Rio Grande to Montana, *Log of a Cowboy* has the sort of accurate and loving realism one associates with Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) or Mary Austin's *Land of Little Rain* (1903): a minor mode, perhaps, but one capable in its way of a range of feeling, beauty and integrity. Through the years writers of serious intent have continued to feel the challenge of formula: Emerson Hough, *North of 36* (1924); Dorothy Scarborough, *The Wind* (1925): Conrad Richter, *The Sea of Grass* (1937); Tom Lea, *The Wonderful Country* (1952); John Houghton Allen, *Southwest* (1952); Jack Warner Schaefer, *Shane* (1954). One need not make a case for a neglected American masterpiece in order to respect the achievements of these books.

It's a perplexing genre, then, the Western: one capable of the most debased sub-imaginative existence and also capable of being turned to high purposes. A damning bill of particulars can quite easily be brought against the genre: its racist overtones, its simplified view of social struggle, its obsession with violence, its anti-intellectualism in terms of the subject matter itself, its self-conscious, near-decadent primitivism. Perhaps, in fact, such disabilities will always preclude final literary success, although the achievement of Von

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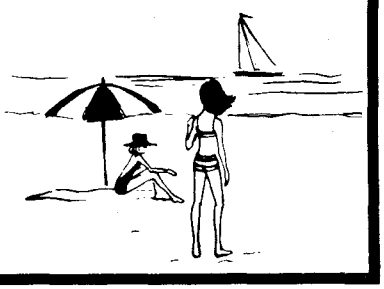

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Tilburg Clark, Thomas Berger and E. L. Doctorow compound this speculation. In any event film-makers seem capable of working well within the genre, although they often seem banal when (Peckinpah with his scorpions in *The Wild Bunch)* they lust after literary symbols. The vitality of the Western has ever remained primarily a matter of folklore and sociology. When writers use it successfully, they are often forced to struggle with the form, not find liberation in it. The Western remains as something to baffle us on many occasions, mislead us on others, hide truth oftentimes, but now and then bring us to face the challenge of great issues.

This is what E. L. Doctorow does in *Welcome to Hard Times:* he takes the thin, somewhat sordid and incipiently depressing materials of the Great Plains experience and fashions them into a myth of good and evil, city-founding and city-destroying. He does it marvelously, with economy and with great narrative power.

It is a simple story. Into Hard Times, a town in the Dakota territory, sometime in the 1880s rides the Man from Bodie, a vicious killer, who embarks upon a rampage of murder, rape and arson. When he rides out a few days later, Hard Times is left a pile of smoking ruins and an array of corpses. Blue, the mayor of the town and the narrator of the novel, proceeds systematically to rebuild the city. He forms a liaison with Molly Riordan, an Irish Catholic New York upstairs-maid-turned-whore, who somehow escaped the killing attentions of the Man from Bodie. They adopt a young boy orphaned in the rampage. Blue gets a Russian whoremaster (who, appropriately enough, transports his girls in a covered wagon) to settle in the destroyed city. The whorehouse becomes a founding institution. Around it a new urban life begins. A Swede settles with his family. A Vermonter opens a store. The stagecoach includes Hard Times in its route.

Hard Times, however, and especially Blue, its mayor, cannot escape a love-hate attraction for the shameful moment of its destruction and rebirth. The true founder of Hard Times was its destroyer, the Man from Bodie, who is, in and of himself, the figure of some essential American evil, at once repulsive and attracting. For the middle-aged Blue, the Man from Bodie is the image of his own cowardliness and the ultimate inconsequentiality of his days. Molly Riordan is obsessed by the Man from Bodie in a loathed-and-loved melange of lust, religious fear and—in his destroying aspects—the very confirmation of her own instability as an Irish Catholic upstairs maid from New York who fled to the Dakota territory to find a better life and wound up being just another whore.

The outcome of Doctorow's fable is obvious: the Man from Bodie returns once again to destroy the city because, in some strange way, he is welcome there. Molly has her death-tryst with her demon lover. Blue kills his demon, but is mortally wounded himself; and Hard Times is once again a smoking ruin.

At their core, Westerns, or indeed any books dealing with the frontier, are elemental parables of good, evil and civilization. In this first novel E. L. Doctorow works in a tradition that includes Wister and Clark, using the frontier as a way of getting at the American formula itself. The trauma of Hard Times's rebirth and redestruction is a statement about the origins of a larger America; for like Hard Times itself, America was founded on notions, ideals, religious feelings, political loyalties, economic motivations together with murder, carnage, pillage and greed. The Man from Bodie is, in some horribly reversed stereotype, the *pius Aeneas* of Hard Times, whose penates are the gods of heedless acquisition, war and hate. Bodie brings out the worst in his victims—and the best. His ultimate weapons are the varieties of corruptions lodged within the townpeople's souls; and when he meets defeat, it is because of their better selves.

Since this debut in 1960 Doctorow has gone on to greater things. What is obvious in this first novel, however, is Doctorow's profound sense of American myth and his marvelous sensitivity to American materials. A writer who makes his debut writing about the frontier is no snob; and when that writer is a man of the East, as is Doctorow, then the possibilities are even richer: for, as has been stated, the East-West dialogue (that is to say, the dialogue between nature and history, innocence and sin) is the basic formula of American writing itself. In this novel, so felicitously revived, we see an incipiently important American writer searching out, patterning and putting into superb narrative myths and materials of great American importance.

Kevin Starr

Kevin Starr is city librarian of San Francisco.

Reconsideration

The Valley of the Moon by Jack London

(Peregrine Smith special edition; $10.95, $7.90 paper)

Although Jack London's philosophy of vital adventure characterized both his extensive writing and his brief life, his brand of *carpe diem* was seldom allied to mere self-indulgence. One of the most generous and amiable of men, London was also one of the most disciplined and constructive, especially when he applied his creative energies to the rehabilitation of California agriculture. The terraced hillsides, irrigation systems, concrete silos, diverse crops, scientifically-bred stock and other innovations begun on his Sonoma ranch are a testament to one of the most appealing of his visions—that of man living in harmony with the land.

In fact London's "Beauty Ranch" was a paradise in name only. A creation of immense effort and expense, he soon wryly renamed it "The Ranch of Good Intentions" and put the management of it into the capable hands of his sister, Eliza Shepard. Although it was a show place that produced its share of prize-winning horses and cattle, the ranch could not pay because of London's ambitious projects and continuous improvements. Ridiculed for "posing" as a farmer and playing a losing game, London's achievements were conveniently overlooked. Neither an amateur nor a failure as a farmer, he introduced a number of practical and progressive ideas about agriculture and revitalized much of his 1300 acres as effectively as he had reinvigorated American literature.

As an agrarian philosopher who admired Thoreau and deplored the urban and industrial blight of the 20th-century life, London felt morally obliged to continue financing his costly agricultural experiment. He also decided to define his case for the ecological possibilities of the land before the Babbitts and bulldozers arrived to conclude it (literary friends like "Red" Lewis and literary heirs like John Steinbeck would later describe those catastrophic events). *The Valley of the Moon* (1913) was written to proclaim the gospel of Back to the Soil, a backward movement by which modern man could only hope to progress,

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liberated from the economic and psychic crises of city life. Nostalgic as this message seemed even in 1913, it has the force today of an acknowledged truth.

London had previously touched upon his "return to nature" theme at the end of an earlier novel, *Burning Daylight* (1910). In that work, a Klondike king turned San Francisco business baron gives up his unhealthy pursuit of the big money in order to "rise" in life as a small Sonoma farmer. When London decided to write another novel about the discovery of California paradise, he prefaced it not with a view of such glamorous heroes, but with the squalid lives of the working-class poor. Such a contrast, he hoped, would most effectively dramatize the redemptive quality of the land upon those manifestly in need of deliverance from industrial society. The open road and great outdoors would help convey his essential message to the children of pioneers who had given up the adventurous spirit of "Westering" to become underpaid drones in the hives of impersonal cities. The result, in *The Valley of the Moon*, is easily the best of his late novels, perhaps the most memorable "journey" novel in California literature before *The Grapes of Wrath*. Although not without architectural and tonal flaws, it remains a minor masterpiece of proletarian fiction for its portrait of economic upheavals and its sympathetic depiction of a young working couple's search for the idyllic life.

London's coupling of urban ordeal and rural odyssey is also an important milestone in the literature of nostalgia. Two decades after Frederick Jackson Turner had declared the frontier closed, London was still busily exploring its literary possibilities in California. While Edgar Lee Masters and Sherwood Anderson prepared to attack the small town, Jack London was fighting a valiant rear-guard action on behalf of the small farm. In an era of optimistic transformation which was moving to the hum of Henry Adams's Dynamo and believed that bigger cities and more efficient machines must mean inevitable progress and perfection, London's defense seemed little more than a sentimental anachronism. In fact it was an astute warning about the anomic consequences of urban disorder and loss of identity; and it was the product of his deepest social and ecological concerns.

Writing from his own experience as one who had narrowly escaped the crushing effects of laboring as a "work beast" and had come to lay his roots down in the land, London dramatized the most ambitious adventure of his adventure-filled life. Battered but resilient enough to undertake an uncertain journey in the pursuit of happiness, his "victims of civilization" project a universal wish; for at its imaginative core, as Earle Labor has observed, "the novel dramatizes one of mankind's oldest dreams: the recovery of Eden." In *The Valley of the Moon*, the modern reader is also likely to recover the flavor of the past—its prejudices, ideals, violence and innocence. Editor Russ Kingman's helpful introduction and useful index of real people represented by characters in the novel, plus selected photographs of the period, document the strong autobiographical and historical basis of the book. Besides working in literary

Jack London

pals like George Sterling and Jimmy Hopper, for example, London himself appears both as a young Oakland boy who dreams of seeing the world and as "Jack Hastings," an author famous as he is folksy. Beyond this startling personal appearance, the novel bears the unmistakable stamp of Jack's own passionate and sincere literary style—a style that, by 1913, had made him the best-known, highest paid and most widely read popular writer in the world, successor to Kipling and Twain.

Despite the incessant potboiling of his one-man fiction factory, London had his moments of compelling artistry and convincing storytelling; in *The Valley of the Moon*, we see some of the particular qualities which account for the vast popularity he earned in his lifetime and continues to enjoy today. In addition the novel reveals that at the peak of his popularity as a writer, London had exchanged socialism for agrarianism as a philosophical base for his fiction. While still condemning vast concentrations of unearned wealth, he ardently defended the free-enterprise system as it existed on the American farm, especially since the enterprise he thought it best preserved was freedom itself.

Reading *The Valley of the Moon* today, one must be prepared for a certain annoying amount of "working-class slang," the cloying proprieties of post-Victorian romance, and something of the boyish spirit that, not without charm of its own, informs the adventure fiction of 60 years ago. Nevertheless the novel is well worth knowing. As a document of economic deprivation in the early years of the 20th century, it parallels London's indictment in *Martin Eden*. Its lyric and mythic treatment of the California countryside is a distinct precursor of such later novels as *The Vineyard* and *To a God Unknown*. If simplistic, its essential tension between the dissension-torn city and the life-sustaining country is still an effective comment on man's misplaced value system. And its warning about the anti-human tendency of mass urbanization is not, as recent history has proved in California and throughout the republic, an altogether invalid prophecy. Finally in one of the most skillful of his performances as a novelist, London chose protagonists who were lowly and ordinary people and not only made them distinct from the masses whom they are intended to mirror, but as interesting—and ultimately as memorable—as any of his more celebrated superheroes.

In Saxon and Billy Roberts, London created fictional characters whose real lives he knew intimately from his own experience and aspiration. They are the forgotten Americans in search of lost America, and because they seek the root and grace which modern society, heedless and violent, has denied them, Saxon and Billy emerge as more than London intended, more than underprivileged heroes or romantic wanderers. The symbolic nature of their quest through the sterility of a modern city and the serenity of a mythic country has assured the novel's continuing appeal as literature if only because, like the best works of London, *The Valley of the Moon* is a hybrid whose "popular" form reveals, on closer inspection, a serious theme.

The Roberts's search—for personal identity, for the great good place in

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which to realize their fullest potential, and for self-sustaining values—is one strongly linked to their creator's own. As a writer who waged war on the exploitative power structure of his day, Jack London rejected the cardinal assumption of America's new corporate state through his countercultural illustrations of enlightened and ennobling individualism. The central tenet of *The Valley of the Moon* is that self-reliant individuals who go back to the values of the land can indeed create alternatives to the competitive and mechanistic disease of 20th century "progress." It was Jack London's last confident response before the time-travel escapism of *The Star Rover* (1915) and the suicidal games of the very rich (whom London understood even less than F. Scott Fitzgerald) in *The Little Lady of the Big House* (1916). But in *The Valley of the Moon*, London articulated a dream both American and archetypal to which he and his readers could easily respond; and there was no reason not to round it off, as he did, with a happy ending.

Howard Lachtman

Howard Lachtman is preparing an anthology of Jack London's writings for the London centennial in 1976.

The Back of the Book

The Only Game in Town

The downfall of the university lecturer in Milan Kundera's "Nobody Will Laugh" occurs because our young hero is feeling good enough to tell white lies and crack small jokes. Celebrating the acceptance of an article in a learned journal, he deludes an admiring scholar into believing that the admirer's own (crackpot) work is worthy of publication. The admirer beseeches and pursues our hero who lies and kids some more in a De Quincey-like progression, eventually involving his girlfriend, the admirer's wife, his university department and the local government in his practical jokes. When all pranks have been played and laid out, the lecturer is without girlfriend, promotion, job, civic standing or scholarly reputation, though he partly comforts himself by observing that his story has been "of the comic variety."

This is the second of a two-part review of Ludvîk Vaculîk's The Guinea Pigs *(TNR, August 30) and Milan Kundera's* Laughable Loves. *Both works are the first of a series, "Writers from the Other Europe," edited by Philip Roth (Penguin Books; $3.50 each).*

All seven stories in Kundera's *Laughable Loves* are "of the comic variety," bearing the same categorical stillness of the lecturer's observation. Comedy and love are the bright-colored filters through which we watch various characters move toward and away from each other; but here the filters overlap, diminishing their own brightnesses and darkening the objects under glass. Love sobers comedy; comedy troubles love. People, of course, prevail, usually making the worst of their possibilities. "The truth is that they aren't *our* stories at all," protests the hero of "Nobody Will Laugh," "that they are foisted on us from somewhere outside." But the stories are indeed their own, they the comic-dangerous, stumbling about like drunks on a boat.

For Kundera massive confusion is the essential human state, the only circumstance where things are clear. Stalinism was more dangerous than fascism, he told Antonin Liehm in *The Politics of Culture* (Grove Press) because "it began as the advocate and gradually converted it into the opposite: love of humanity into cruelty, love of truth into denunciation, and so on." Under such a regime uncertainty and flux become standards of survival and excellence; and if there is no sense of humor permitted, the sense of paradox is undeniable. But paradox to the core: reconciliations formed in the objective eye, and not always in the eye of the beholder. In "The Hitchhiking Game" in which a girl plays tramp for her boyfriend in order to test herself and please him, the boyfriend recoils at the lascivious mask on the face of his beloved: "These two images showing through each other were telling him that *everything* was in the girl, that her soul was terrifyingly amorphous, that it held faithfulness and unfaithfulness, treachery and innocence, flirtatiousness and chastity."

Like the lecturer's pranks, this game of pretence is no game. The boyfriend is disgusted by the disorder he finds, disgust both natural and stupid. He wants order like the mad vet in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and the order he wants—plain girl, plain style, predictable action, domestic tranquility—this is the order of real confusion (and the basis of comedy, as Henri Bergson proved). Part of the paradox himself, the boyfriend, logically, does not approve of paradox. Fun's fun, but not when you lose your perspective.

Of course the loss of perspective is what Kundera wishes for us—at least the loss of a perspective that protects us from one out of our smug control. We say that perspective allows self-mockery, but as Kundera demonstrates, there is a great mocking universe, wider than the grin is wide, in which all jokers become part of all jokes. This universe, that piles paradox on paradox, is no laughing matter. It is the heart of seriousness, the essential frame of reference walled by mirrors, where most of Kundera's characters wind up neither laughing nor loving.

This is where Edward of "Edward and God" winds up, longing for God, "for God alone is relieved of the distracting obligation of *appearing* and can merely *be*. For He solely constitutes (He Himself, alone and nonexistent) the essential opposite of this unessential (but so much more existent) world." Early in the story Edward tries to woo the virgin Alice to bed, but Alice says no, leaning on piety. When Edward finally succeeds (because Alice is attracted to his feigned holy living), he discovers that Alice's allure was her faith; hypocrite to the hilt, he rejects her for commandment breaking, and then, naturally, regrets his rejection. In the end Edward does not believe in God, but very much believes in the ideal of the essential. After the last laugh (on him), he wants to take things seriously.

Kundera's happier people (Dr. Havel of "Symposium" and "Dr. Havel After Ten Years" and the two gallants of "The Golden Apple of Eternal Desire") never quite reach the last laugh. Something in their make-ups, akin to art, keeps them from pursuing the jokes they make and the jokes they are down to logical consequence. These people are artists of

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the beautiful, in Hawthorne's sense, making art of love, of erotic love in particular ("It is an art," Dr. Havel tells his apprentice) and art of comedy. Holding both love and laughter in perpetual abeyance, they live lightly but well: examples and perpetrators of the grand confusion Kundera celebrates. They have stamina, the salient gift of lovers and comedians.

As for the others, they fall precisely because they strive to reach conclusions: to make professor, or a girl; to find and inhabit one solid state of happiness. Our young lecturer of "Nobody Will Laugh" is a great kidder, a master of disguises. He tells his Klara that all his hoaxes were not lies but ways of making the truth palatable, which is so. Yet the strategy was devised by a man on the make, whose essential truth lay in his believing that words could control destiny. He too

Milan Kundera

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wants order, and so, satisfying the universal paradox, eventually finds himself not only out of order, the order he sought to conquer, but unaware of his ostracism.

What people see with their eyes, as opposed to what they dream to see, is Kundera's way of opposing paradoxically awareness and unawareness, youth and age, ignorance and knowledge, foolishness and wisdom—and perhaps central to the world of games, winners and losers. Alice insists that the room be pitch black when she and Edward make love, so Edward's fantasies of her body remain intact. In "Let the Old Dead Make Room for the Young Dead" the young man recollects his one-night affair with a woman he coveted for months; she too kept the room dark, and it seemed to him that he was making love "with someone spurious or else someone quite unreal and unindividuated." In both stories darkness keeps bright "the golden apple of eternal desire," but here the brightness has a sad tint. Where all is in the dream, nothing is realized except disappointment; people only see clearly that which repulses them.

Meanwhile the survivers keep their innocence, which in Kundera's terms means nominal experience. They are "experienced" love-makers—that is all they care to do—stay young making love, or grow old and fat making love; and for all their brief encounters and pick-ups remain joyously at ease with the comedy they perform. But who is to laugh at them? If these loves are laughable, which ones are not? Kundera chose love to propel his confused people because love makes a world where there is no escape from clichés.

"There is no escape from a game" either, says Kundera, which is sort of a cliché too. Clichés, after all, are things too true that we consider false; another paradox. *Laughable Loves* is a cliché itself: a planned piece of literature starting with the small titter of the hitchhiking game and working up to God as belly laugh. Needless to tell, the "Golden Apple" falls in the middle—a cliché of structure. But nothing to fret about or try to solve. What counts, as Kundera shows us, is tenderness, as usual; that and the resolute nonsense of our need for love.

Roger Rosenblatt

Correspondence

Marple She Says

To the editors:

Regarding Michael Holquist's article "Murder She Says" (*TNR*, July 26), I say error, error most foul! Mr. Holquist states that Miss Jane Marple, Dame Agatha's feisty female sleuth, first appeared in *Murder at the Vicarage* written in 1930. If Mr. Holquist would check the L & B room of the Sterling Memorial Library at the school where he is employed, he would find a copy of *The Tuesday Club Murders* with a copyright date of 1928. Miss Marple certainly appears in this book.

Furthermore, as one who has read both Poirot and Marple cases, I can unequivocably say that Miss Marple is a much more enjoyable character. Crimes are brought to M. Poirot's attention; Miss Marple seems to stumble upon them. Poirot uses his "little grey cells" and by induction and deduction arrives at a solution. Miss Marple's talents are much more lovable. As she once said, "Living all these years in St. Mary Mead does give one an insight into human nature." I ask you Mr. Holquist, has M. Poirot ever solved a murder by recalling an Edwardian nursery rhyme or that nurses carry litmus paper?

Timothy J. Hoy
Napoleon, Ohio

On B. H. Haggin

To the editors:

The article by B.H. Haggin on the Metropolitan Opera (*TNR*, August 16 & 23) is a curious mixture of thoughtful observations and fuzzy digressions. Much of the article, in fact, has nothing whatever to do with the Metropolitan Opera—only with the likes and dislikes (mostly the latter) of Haggin himself.

His most objectionable comment comes in a discussion of Benjamin Britten's music. Britten may or may not be "England's major composer." That is debatable. But the description of *Bach*—in the same breath—as one who goes "through the motions of saying something while actually saying nothing," is pathetic.

Bach needs no defense against ignorance or malice. Still, I cannot resist the conclusion that it is Haggin—far more than the much-criticized Rudolf Bing—who is "confident in his possession of the taste he clearly lacks."

Peter Strachan
Tenafly, New Jersey

To the editors:

As a long-time subscriber to *The New Republic* I wrote to the former editor many years ago lamenting the dropping of B.H. Haggin as the music and record critic of the magazine. The reply I received promised a new and expanded coverage of music with a new critic.

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Instead, the attention to music grew ever less and eventually disappeared. The loss of Mr. Haggin was in any event permanent—or so it seemed. I can hardly tell you of my delight to find "B.H. Haggin on the Metropolitan Opera" in the current issue, and I commend you not only on the reappearance of a major critical voice in the field of music, but on the rectifying of a great wrong done to this man as well as to the readers of *The New Republic*.

I confess I had strong worries that the change of ownership in the magazine would bring unwelcome changes, and there have been significant losses. However, the essentials of Stanley Kauffmann, TRB and John Osborne are still with us, and my admiration for *The New Republic* continues unabated. Now with the return of B.H. Haggin I look forward to still finer days.

Again, my congratulations for a wise and courageous move in a new direction—or an old one.

Thomas B. Gentry
Lexington, Virginia

To the editors:

Allow me to applaud you on the opera piece and the return to your pages of the incomparable (and encyclopedia) B.H. Haggin. May one hope to see more of Mr. Haggin, perhaps regularly.

Jerrold R. Hickey
Manchester, Massachusetts

Solzhenitsyn Debate

To the editors:

"Solzhenitsyn with a Grain of Salt" by Roger Morris (*TNR*, August 16 & 23) badly wanted saying, especially the acute observations on the great novelist's one-sided analysis of the Cold War and his failure to state if not see America's own serious problems with injustice and human degradation. There was only one thing I looked for in Morris and did not find. That was Solzhenitsyn's theocratic proposals to the Kremlin leadership when he left Russia. He essentially begged for a return to a benevolent tribal condition under religious hegemony—to what Rousseau longed for when not writing the *Emile* but recalling his youth in Calvinist Geneva. If carried out by a converted Kremlin leadership, these proposals would result in as stultifying an intellectual society as the present climate in Russian politics, arts and letters. This, unfortunately, is "that vindication of existence and that deliverance from history" Morris hopes for from the genius of Solzhenitsyn and might be all that could be expected from "the land he has left behind." For the problem is, stated briefly, that Russia under the czars and the commissars has yet to entertain and actualize a vision, perhaps Kantian in inspiration, of a society comprised of autonomous individuals each free to be self-directing while treating one another as ends and not only as means—not in a theocracy however humane but in a secular constitutional democracy in which even nonbelief is taken as a right.

Erling Skorpen
Orono, Maine

To the editors:

Mr. Morris's dismissal of Solzhenitsyn's political perceptions as cold war anachronisms, if faddish among new left intellectuals, has a hollow ring. I leave aside the questions of where Mr. Morris's conscious or subconscious sympathies reside, and what are the consequences for our grandchildren of the national pastime of razorwork on the national psyche, that he and *The New Republic* indulge in, as they interpret history in new left rhetoric unhampered by the facts.

What strikes me more is Mr. Morris's happy belief that one eliminates an inhospitable thesis by ignoring it. This style may satisfy many readers, but the comforts of head-in-sand analysis are fetched at the price of clogged ears.

It is too bad that in this world of free, less free and totalitarian states, Mr. Morris cannot find a boundary between liberty and tyranny. So handicapped, he fails to deal with the root idea of

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Solzhenitsyn's political message—that humanity and communism are irresolvable, historically and logically, and the chasm between awaits the blind.

Solzhenitsyn's expulsion from the Soviet Union (He had become too great to kill) and his Washington and New York addresses to the AFL-CIO are a dramatic revelation of the lie that is at the heart of Communist ideology and ethics. Solzhenitsyn lays this lie bare at a time when the West, confused in its values, would like to ignore it. The flimflam of détente scarcely conceals Soviet intentions at home and abroad. Thus the persecution of Russian Jews and the export to deserving nations of the anti-humanity revolution continue, as does the astounding expansion, beyond any conceivable purpose other than world domination, of the Soviet military machine.

Amid these realities, détente is the vision of the Emperor Without Clothes. Solzhenitsyn's call to "interfere" is not a call to get on with World War III, as Morris would have it, but an appeal to the logic of the proposition that the values of humanity require vigorous demonstration.

Thus the current mindless rejection of Solzhenitsyn by American liberals points up the fundamental cleavage in America between those who find values relative and those who find values eternal. But that is the lesser bonus. More fundamentally, Solzhenitsyn has stripped away from the Communist dynamic all its elaborate screens and fakeries. Possessing the clearest moral vision of any man of our era, he has set clear again the moral polarities that govern our world. To the West, this Russian is a gift and summons.

John Romjue
Hampton, Virginia

Arms for Jordan

To the editors:

Your editorial of August 16th, "Doves and Hawks," is seriously in error.

First, the editorial is based on the premise that Congress was considering the size of the arms sale to Jordan and that Sen. McGovern was in favor of the "full" Administration request.

However, the issue at hand was a Case proposal to disallow the entire arms sale. Had that motion passed, the United States would have had to withdraw from the Jordanian agreement. At that point, virtually all experts agree that the Jordanians would have turned to the Soviet Union for arms.

On the other hand, had the Case motion failed, the United States could begin selling the arms to Jordan. But the deliveries would be scheduled over a number of years and Congress would have the right, at any time, to suspend such deliveries (as was done with regard to Turkey).

Of course, Sen. McGovern would have favored a smaller arms sale to Jordan, but that was not the issue raised.

Second, you find it "strange" that Sen. McGovern, "an outspoken foe of foreign military sales," supported the sale of some arms to Jordan. The fact is that Sen. McGovern has always realized the need, in the current world situation, for selected, limited arms sales. Has *The New Republic* also found Sen. McGovern's unwavering support of arms sales to Israel "strange"?

Finally, you indicate that Sen. McGovern was alone in his position. If that were so, why did not Sen. Case's motion come to a vote—and why was it not passed, 16-1? The fact is that numerous senators supported Sen. McGovern's position. A number did not do so publicly, because of justifiable fear of political retribution. But they did so privately—and that is why the issue was delayed until a compromise could be reached.

Alan Baron
Executive Assistant
to Sen. George McGovern

In reply:

Alan Baron's letter in defense of Sen. McGovern suggests that neither he nor his employer has the public courage of the Senator's "closed session" convictions. Fortunately, some of McGovern's colleagues on the Foreign Relations Committee were so stunned by his role as eager flak for Secretary Kissinger's desire to sell Hawk missiles to Jordan, and spoke about this widely enough in Washington that Mr. Baron's letter emerges simply as an effort to deceive our readers.

The substance of the Case resolution to disallow the American "letter of offer" to Jordan was by statute the only legislative option open to opponents of the proposed sale of 14 batteries of Hawk missiles and other hardware. No senator, however, was totally opposed to selling any weapons to Jordan. What they felt was that the large quantity involved would significantly and dangerously alter the military and political balance in the Middle East. The Case resolution was, then, the indispensable vehicle to get the State Department to go back and come up with the "smaller arms sale to Jordan" which Mr. Baron says Sen. McGovern would have favored but actually didn't. The deliberations over the Case resolution in fact focused precisely on efforts to reach a compromise with the administration as to the extent of the arrangement. That effort continues. But McGovern, even in the face of a search for a compromise, consistently argued the administration's case for the full arms deal. Moreover, he used that hoary rationale, "if we don't sell it to them, they'll get it from the Russians" which has justified our being arms purveyors and profiteers to just about anyone who wants to buy and often to both sides of a conflict, *e.g.* India and Pakistan, Greece and Turkey, Israel and the Arabs.

Mr. Baron says that "Sen. McGovern has always realized the need, in the current world situation, for selected, limited arms sales. What are the standards of need in each particular case? And in this instance, why would McGovern end up supporting a transaction much larger than what even our arms-profligate Joint Chiefs of Staff believe to be quite adequate for Jordan's defense? Neither Baron nor McGovern, moreover, has tried to deal with the arguments mustered in committee and in these pages that the transfer of these weapons would more likely provoke war than deter it.

The Baron letter tries to obscure for domestic political purposes the real meaning of Sen. McGovern's behavior in this matter. But for all his rhetorical commitment to Israel's security, his actions speak louder than his words. In any case, at a press conference in Jerusalem in April, he asked "Please don't hold those of us in Congress to statements signed for domestic consumption." This indicates the small worth McGovern himself places on his words, at least about the Middle East.

The editors

Up on Downers

To the editors:

As a practicing internist with no connections to Hoffman-LaRoche I strongly object to the tone of John Pekkanen's

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recent article "The Tranquilizer War" (*TNR*, July 19).

Virtually any medicine from aspirin to enemas has the potential for abuse and dependency with certain personalities. To most physicians in practice this has been a minor problem with the Chlorodiazepoxides (Librium) and Diazepams (Valium), contrary to what Mr. Pekkanen implies. A warning about the potential for abuse has been readily available in the accompanying product circular since the first cases were reported. There has been no 'promotional avalanche' that could keep such information from conscientious practitioners.

No drug is found 'virtually by accident' although one may be serendipitously discovered as part of a company's research program. While pharmaceutical companies may realize substantial profits in the first years of marketing before drug patents expire much of this money is ploughed back into the extensive research programs that companies maintain to make new drugs available.

These drugs are widely utilized by physicians because of their therapeutic effectiveness, not simply to relieve anxiety. Chlorodiazepoxide has become one of the agents of choice in treating severe alcoholic withdrawal (delerium tremens). Diazepam is regarded by many neurologists as the agent of choice for *status epilepticus* and, its use as a sedative agent, has allowed many endoscopic procedures (previously requiring expensive hospitalization) to be performed on an outpatient basis.

Malcolm L. Brigden M.D.
Rochester, Minnesota

Kauffmann, *from page 20*

humorous Southern hold-up man in 1957 who specializes in robbing—in the friendliest way—filling stations run by the S.O.S. company, giving the attendants a small part of the stake as a private goodwill gesture. He is a Korean War veteran, a Don Juan, a staunch anti-Communist, a vigorous, unvicious, humping, country-boy hell-raiser. While fleeing the police he gets involved with a tatty little group called the Dixie Dancekings and devotes himself to helping them make it big in Nashville. His nemesis at last is a fundamentalist lawman hired by the fundamentalist head of S.O.S.; the lawman is played with his usual insufficiency by Art Carney, who never has enough power, technique or flavor but whose reputation grows because he has been around a long time and now plays different kinds of character leads and big supporting roles. For me he has not advanced much past the dullish and mechanical "feed" he was on the old Jackie Gleason show.

The picture is much nonsense and some charm, and the charm is all Reynolds. He has emerged from his beefcake persona, as in *Deliverance*, to become a limited but pleasant light comedian, whose forte is making some fun of his own sex appeal. I have a hunch that this evolution was made *for* Reynolds by the discovery of his private lightness at private parties or their new public equivalent—the TV talk show. Howard Hawks said that he made a comedian of Carole Lombard, who had not done much comedy, after he saw her at a party with a couple of drinks in her. One of the utilities of film is to be able to exploit "behavior" as against true comic acting (see Lombard vis-a-vis John Barrymore in *Twentieth Century*). It's working again here, very nicely, for Reynolds, with the helping hand of the director John G. Avildsen.

This would have been a good minor piece if the scriptwriter Thomas Rickman had pulled W.W. himself into shape as an understandable character. Why did he become a criminal? Why against S.O.S.? Why does he think he can keep getting away with it? Doesn't he understand what he's doing to his musician friends when he enlists them in crime? Is he just a happy sexy madman? None of these questions gets answered. So a possibly flavorful regional comedy becomes a series of better and worse vaudeville acts.

Note: This makes (at least) the third film centered on Nashville and country music in two years. One of the other two I needn't specify; the other, alas, I probably must. *Payday* (*TNR*, March 17, '73) with Rip Torn was narrower in scope than Altman's biggie, but in resonance was for me the best of the lot. I hope it doesn't get lost.

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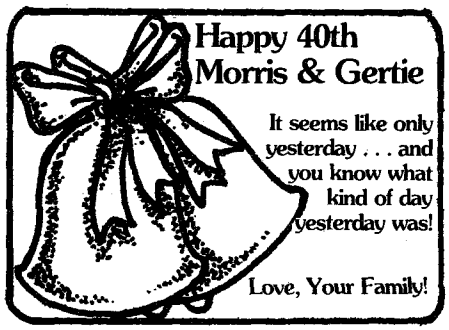

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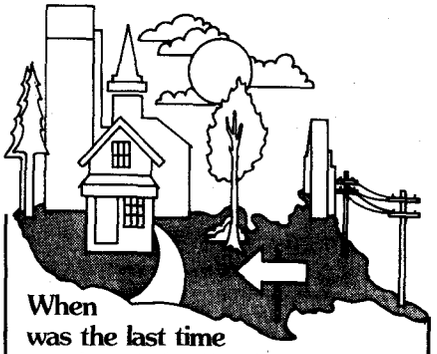

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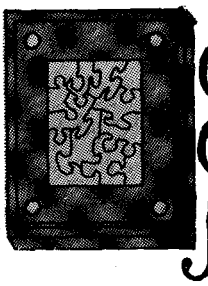

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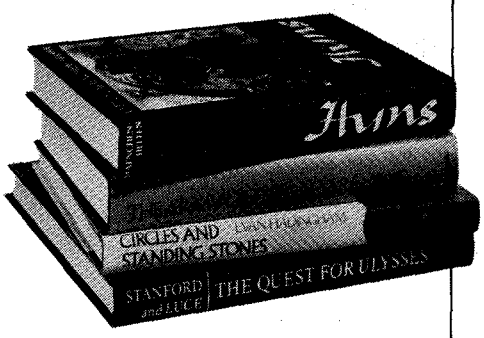

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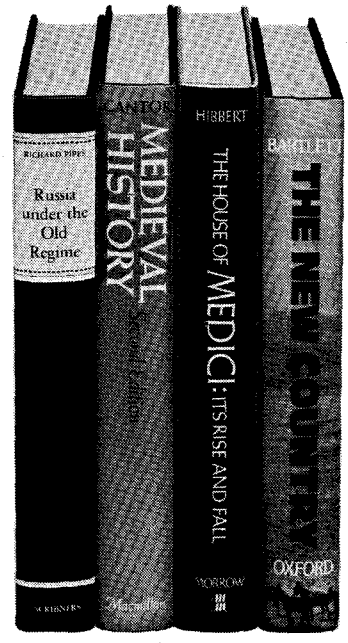

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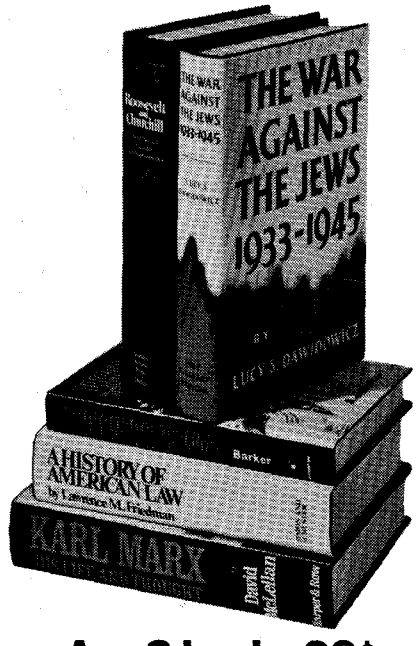

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